



LIBRARY
Theological Seminary,

PRINCETON, N. J.

No. Case, 127

No. Shelf, 7

No. Book, 26

The John M. Krebs Donation.

51.150
51.158

LECTURES
ON
THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM,

DELIVERED IN THE
PARISH CHURCH OF ST. JAMES,' BRISTOL ;

TO WHICH IS ADDED
A DISCOURSE
ON PERSONAL ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

BY THE
REV. THOMAS T. BIDDULPH, A.M.

MINISTER OF THE SAID PARISH, AND LATE OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD.

SECOND EDITION.

PUBLISHED BY R. B. SEELEY AND W. BURNSIDE :
AND SOLD BY L. AND J. SEELEY,
FLEET STREET, LONDON.
MDCCCXXXV.

•

SEELEYS, THAMES DITTON, SURREY.

P R E F A C E.

THE Author of the following Lectures, in presenting his views of practical religion again to the public eye, is conscious of being engaged in a very serious and responsible work ; not that he dreads the censure of man, but because it is his aim to convey to his fellow-sinners the momentous truths of the everlasting Gospel. Religion is a subject of infinite and eternal importance : to touch the ark of the covenant is a fearful act, even when the hands are hallowed that approach it. The Apostle's alarming question,—“ Who is sufficient for these things ? ”—has recurred to the Author's mind, and awakened in it godly jealousy. He feels like one who is launching a vessel, loaded with treasure, for a voyage of unknown extent, both as to time and space ; for who can define the limits, to which sentiments, when once issued from the press, may reach, or ascertain into what hands they may find admission ! Without looking forward to more than a present edition, even a single copy may be the instrument of incalculable good or evil, long after the hand that wrote it has been laid inactive in the grave.

With these solemn impressions on his mind, the

Author has earnestly besought HIM, whose honour and the interest of whose kingdom he desires to promote, to vouchsafe the guidance of His Holy Spirit and His blessing on what is now submitted to the public. From Him “all holy desires, good counsels, and just works, proceed;” and the Author is fully convinced that all beneficial effect from the following Lectures depends on the influence of His grace. May that influence sanction this effort to promote “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ!”

With respect to his own congregation, the Author contemplates the volume now presented to them in the character of a *legacy*. He has laboured among them for more than thirty years, and cannot expect that his labour of love will be much longer protracted. To his beloved family, therefore, he commits his last views of a subject which must be admitted to be of vital and eternal importance both to them and to himself. After almost half a century, employed in the work of the ministry, during which it has been his endeavour to “know nothing but JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED,” he sees no reason to anticipate any material alteration of his creed during the few remaining days of his earthly pilgrimage; and he therefore subjoins to the outline of Gospel-Truth which he has preached, which has been his comfort in life, and to which he looks for support in death, his cordial, and, perhaps, concluding AMEN.

LECTURES.

PSALM LI. 1.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.

IT has been maintained by an eminent critic on the sacred volume, in his posthumous remarks on the Book of Psalms, that the fifty-first can have no reference to the event to which its production is assigned by the title prefixed to it. That title ascribes its occasion to the penitential feelings of the writer's own mind, stating it to be "a Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." It supposes the Psalm to express the conviction and compunction of the royal sufferer, when brought by the parable

of the Divinely commissioned Seer to a sense of the guilt which he had incurred, the loss he had sustained, and the danger to which he had exposed himself, by transgressions of the holy law of God almost unparalleled in the history of the church.

As it is proposed in the ensuing lectures to consider this Psalm as a model of true penitence for every age; and to refer to David as affording a pattern of such penitence; it seems necessary to notice the objection raised by the learned prelate to whom an allusion has been made, before we proceed to its explication, and an application of the doctrine and experience contained in it to ourselves. He considers the fourth and the eighteenth verses as being incompatible with any interpretation which would assign the occasion of the Psalm to the personal history of David; and he therefore maintains that it is designed by the prophetic Spirit, as an expression of the feelings of the converted Jews at their final return to God, when "the Spirit of grace and of supplication" shall have been poured out upon them, and "they shall look unto Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and as one that is in bitterness for his first born."

It will probably appear, when we come to consider the verses to which the Bishop has referred, in their succession, that no such in-

compatibility really exists. But if those verses could not be easily made to concur with that view of the Psalm which has been usually adopted; what should hinder us from admitting in this instance, as we are under a necessity of doing in many other Scriptures of a prophetical character, a double sense; and from ascribing the expression of penitence contained in it, primarily to the personal experience of David, and ultimately to converted Israel, when “the Deliverer shall come out of Sion, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob?” This double use would remove the supposed difficulties which occurred to the learned critic; and would likewise remove a more serious obstacle to his own interpretation, arising out of the mention of animal sacrifices in the last verse of the Psalm. On this subject more will be said when the passages spoken of, come before us in the course of the ensuing lectures.

In reviewing the circumstances under which this Psalm was written, we may remark that prayer is then only successful in its object, when it proceeds from a broken and a contrite heart; and that repentance is then the deepest, when it flows from a consciousness of mercy received. Nathan had said unto David, “The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die.”

We now return to the text, with which this

formulary of penitential devotion opens ; in which we shall consider—

1. TO WHOM THE PRAYER WHICH IT CONTAINS, AND INDEED THE WHOLE PSALM, IS ADDRESSED.

2. THE OBJECT WHICH A PENITENT SINNER PROPOSES TO HIMSELF IN DRAWING NEAR TO GOD ; AND THE SPIRIT OR FRAME OF MIND IN WHICH HE ADDRESSES HIM.

3. THE MEASURE OR RULE ACCORDING TO WHICH A PENITENT SINNER DESIRES TO BE DEALT WITH IN THE EXPECTED ANSWER TO HIS PRAYER.

We are to consider—1. TO WHOM THE PRAYER WHICH THE TEXT CONTAINS, AND INDEED THE WHOLE PSALM, IS ADDRESSED.

It is addressed to GOD, to whom the prerogative of forgiving sin exclusively belongs. The Jews were right in the assertion implied in the question they asked for the purpose of charging our Lord with blasphemy—"Who can forgive sins but God only"¹—though they were utterly wrong in rejecting our Lord's claim to this prerogative of Deity. It is to be remarked that the penitent in our text does not address himself to God under the name JEHOVAH ; but that he makes use of the plural title, which is commonly

¹ Mark ii. 7.

employed in Scripture when the gracious intercourse of Deity with fallen creatures is spoken of. The title implies the covenant relation to sinful man which God has been pleased to reveal through Jesus Christ our Lord. Perhaps the address of a contrite sinner, in using this plural title, cannot be better paraphrased than in the words of our beautiful Litany. Mercy is implored by the use of this title from each of the three Persons in the adorable Trinity, separately; and from the Trinity, as THREE in ONE.

O GOD THE FATHER OF HEAVEN,—HAVE MERCY UPON US, MISERABLE SINNERS.

O GOD THE SON, REDEEMER OF THE WORLD,—HAVE MERCY UPON US, MISERABLE SINNERS.

O GOD THE HOLY GHOST, PROCEEDING FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON,—HAVE MERCY UPON US, MISERABLE SINNERS.

O HOLY, BLESSED AND GLORIOUS TRINITY, THREE PERSONS AND ONE GOD,—HAVE MERCY UPON US, MISERABLE SINNERS.

Such is the appeal which the word of grace sanctions, and which the awakened conscience, when enlightened by the word and Spirit of God, finds to be the only appeal that can be made with the prospect of a successful issue. The notion of an absolute God, possessed of wisdom, power, holiness, and justice, can, of itself, afford no comfort. Every view of these

glorious perfections, independently of their state of harmony in the Gospel, must increase alarm and promote despair. The Revelation on which our hope must be built, contains not a word on the subject of uncovenanted mercy. It is a mere figment of the imagination,—a foundation of sand, which cannot for a moment sustain the superstructure of hope, when the nature of sin is duly appreciated, and the consequent storm of guilt has been excited. The momentous question, “How shall man be just with God,”¹ can never receive a satisfactory answer but by a reference to the Gospel of Christ, which is a revelation of the covenant of redemption in Jesus Christ our Lord. Independently of that redemption, “Our God is a consuming fire.”²

Is there not reason to fear, that many persons orally join in the use of the Litany of our church, who are wholly destitute of those sensibilities which characterise a state of true penitence;—and that while they describe themselves, in addressing the Searcher of hearts, as “miserable sinners,” they are unconscious of their own condition, as guilty, polluted and condemned;—that they feel not that misery which they profess to feel, and, in truth, mean nothing by the appeal to Divine mercy in which their lips join? Many, it may

¹ Job ix. 2.

² Heb. xii. 29.

be feared, join loudly in “the confession of a true faith” by “acknowledging” with their lips “the glory of the eternal Trinity,” who have never considered those covenant relations for the sake of which the mystery of the Triune God has been revealed to fallen man. They are Trinitarians, because the doctrine of the Trinity is the orthodox doctrine, the doctrine of the church established in the country in which they live. They are political Trinitarians, and not such because they feel their own need of “grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.”

But do the convictions of my own heart concur with the words I use, and the confession I make, while engaged in outward unison with the congregation of professed penitents, who address the throne of grace in the language of the Litany? The inquiry is one of individual application, and of eternal moment. What is the answer which conscience gives?

We proceed to consider, in a more particular manner,

2dly. THE OBJECT WHICH A PENITENT SINNER PROPOSES TO HIMSELF IN DRAWING NEAR TO GOD; AND THE SPIRIT OR FRAME OF MIND IN WHICH HE ADDRESSES HIM.

What then is the object which the royal penitent in the text proposes? Does he express solicitude to wipe off the foul disgrace which he

had brought on himself among his fellow-creatures,—or, to silence the reproaches of his own conscience,—or, to be freed from the domestic and civil calamities which God, by His servant Nathan, had assured him would be the consequences of his sins? These are not the objects which the text specifies as those which pressed on the mind of David; nor is either of these, in any instance of true repentance, the primary or the main object of solicitous concern.

What then is that object? It is to obtain “mercy” from God. The penitent estimates rightly the comparative importance of time and of eternity—of the present life and of the life to come. And while the half-awakened mind is concerned only about the temporal inconveniences which sin may have occasioned, the soul that is born of God discovers the infinitely deeper consequence of eternal realities; and, under the conviction of the importance attached to a recovery of Divine favour, merges all inferior considerations in this overwhelming concern. While the former finds satisfaction and repose in being restored to the good opinion of the world, and in a gradual forgetfulness of his sin; the latter can take no rest, till he has found peace in the only way in which it can be attained, through faith in the blood of atonement. It is not the whited sepulchre, but the heart laid open in all its guilt and pollution, that is

accessible to pardon and comfort. The world may applaud the former; but it is the latter only that God accepts.

A discovery of sin, as an offence against the purity of God, and as disqualifying the soul for admission to His presence and the enjoyment of His favour, is the first symptom of genuine repentance. Till this discovery be made, till the condemning and polluting nature of sin be felt and acknowledged, though there may be an alarm created in the mind, it is not true repentance. The prodigal, in our Lord's parable, felt not only the personal privations and sufferings which his base and rebellious conduct had brought on him; but he immediately adverted to their cause. His own folly had banished him from his father's house, and the blessings of his father's family; and nothing could satisfy him but the recovery of his father's forfeited favour. Hence the wise resolution he formed—"I will return unto my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Sorrow for sin, when it is accompanied with a consciousness of its necessary effect, as a just cause of exclusion from the favour of God, and of exposure to His displeasure; and with a further consciousness that not only exemption from its penalty in present and future sufferings, but also a restoration to the favour of God and

to communion with Him, are essential to the happiness of the soul ; such sorrow is that “ Godly sorrow, which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.” It originates in “ Godly ” motives ; and is thereby distinguished from “ the sorrow of the world which worketh death.” The latter, like the remorse of Cain, may find relief in worldly cares and amusements ; while the former must remain till its cause, the frown of our heavenly Father is exchanged for the smile of reconciliation. The latter, like the despair of Abitophel and of Judas, often terminates in weariness of life and in self-destruction ; the former, accompanied as it always is with a gleam of hope in the infinite mercy of God revealed in His Gospel, and with an assured knowledge that “ the wages of sin is death ” eternal, perseveres in “ the humble suit of a sinner ” till its object be obtained. Its recourse for relief is not to worldly amusement, not to the holy law of God, not to any duties arising out of the requisitions of that law,—but to the infinite mercy of God, of which the Gospel of Christ is the revelation.

But let us consider the phraseology in which the Divinely instructed penitent urges his request. “ Blot out my transgressions.” In the following verses he varies his language, and suggests different views both of sin and of pardon. In the request now before us, sin is considered

as a debt, and pardon as an act of obliterating the charge in the book of Divine remembrance in which the debt has been recorded. It will be remembered that our Lord has adopted the same description of sin in His parable¹ of the two debtors, one of whom owed the creditor of both five hundred pence, and the other fifty; and the same view of it is also taken in one of the petitions of the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples—"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Every sin then is a debt which we have contracted; and were there only a single debt recorded against us, we should be in an insolvent state; for we have "nothing to pay." What can a sinner have to offer in payment of the debt of sin? If "the wages of sin" be eternal "death," finite suffering can never liquidate the debt.² And the folly of supposing that any after obedience, even if man were capable of obeying, can make compensation for what is past, is too absurd to need confutation.

¹ Luke vii. 41.

² Most absurd is the doctrine held by the Romish Church concerning a purgatory after death. Not a shadow of evidence on the subject of any such intermediate state is to be found in Scripture. There we learn that the wicked "go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal." The soul, till quickened by the Spirit of God, is "dead in trespasses and sins;" and as soon as it is quickened or converted, it is simultaneously pardoned through faith in the Divine Saviour, "whose blood cleanseth from all sin."

But the fact is that the moral debtor cannot avoid adding to his load of debt, every day, hour, and moment, till mercy has crossed the book, and the whole is freely remitted.

This is the notion of forgiveness adopted in the first part of the penitent's prayer, "Blot out my transgressions." It presupposes in the mind of the supplicant a persuasion that God can, without injustice to His own character, or staining His own perfections, forgive sin. It presupposes a knowledge of the way in which God can be "just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Such a prayer, therefore, as that of the text, is "the prayer of faith." A sinner, acquainted with the character of God, cannot come into His presence, asking Him to blot His own attributes by blotting out His creature's sin—to undeify Himself in order to save a transgressor from condign punishment. Such an absurdity is too gross to be admitted by any one who is at all enlightened by the word and Spirit of God. It may, indeed, be entertained by those who are strangers to the character of Him, whose goodness cannot be separated from holiness and justice.

There is another view of sin, besides that of its being a debt to be obliterated from the book in which it is charged, which is sometimes connected with the verb employed in the petition now under our consideration. Sin is spoken of

under the notion of a cloud, more or less dense, which interposes between the earth and the sun, and which prevents the cheering influence of the latter from reaching us. Thus God, in the forty-fourth chapter of the prophet Isaiah, after setting before His people the gross absurdity of their idolatry, and exhorting them to repentance adds the following most gracious declaration —“I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee.” As the rising sun dissipates the dark clouds which have been formed during the night, and clears from the atmosphere every trace of the threatening appearances which had overspread the heavens; so Divine mercy, revealed to the penitent soul, dissipates the cloud of vengeance which sin has merited, and removes the fearful apprehensions which accompany guilt, so as to leave behind no vestige of its former state. Thus it is when the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in his rays.

The word “transgression,” which is a literal version of the original term, describes what sin is in relation to the holy law of God. That law is the line of duty. Sin is a stepping over, or beside, that line, by omission of what the law commands, or commission of what it forbids. The law, the rule of duty, peremptorily requires from every rational creature a supreme love to

God, an unceasing and uninterrupted regard to Him. This was the law of heaven, it was that of paradise, it is that of earth, and it is also the law of hell. It is the inalienable claim which necessarily arises from the relation which subsists between the Creator and all His reasonable creatures. It commences with the dawn of reason, and can never expire. The rights of the Sovereign cannot be annihilated or weakened by the rebellion of his subjects. Those rights would remain unimpaired, though every subject in his dominion had proved a rebel.

But the word “transgression” in our text is, I apprehend, in the singular number, though our translators have made it plural, and seems to designate something of an individual character. It may be compared with “THE transgression,”¹ “the transgression of Adam,” “the one offence by which sin entered into the world, and death by” that “sin.”² Perhaps David referred to this parent sin, in which all mankind were implicated, that “original sin” which in its consequences becomes “the guilt and corruption of the nature of every one who is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam.”³ That he had been instructed to trace up actual sin to its proper source, is evident from that part of his confession which is found in the 5th verse,

¹ το παραπλῶμα.

² Rom. v. 12.

³ Article ix.

“ Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Of this parent sin all mankind feel the combined effect in native guilt and corruption ; and every one naturally manifests in his own spirit and conduct the same proud rebellious temper which produced, and the same outrageous conduct which constituted the first transgression ; and therefore, both by its federal origin and its individual imitation, “ in every person born into this world it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation.” Such was the doctrine of the penitent and inspired author of the Psalm under our consideration ; and such is the recorded doctrine of our own scriptural church.

As we shall be required to enlarge on this awful and important subject of “ original sin,” when we discuss the 5th verse of our Psalm ; (I may call it *ours*, not only as being the subject of present discussion, but as expressing the feelings of every genuine penitent ;) as this will be hereafter necessary, I shall now observe only that, if we admit this reference to original sin in the word “ transgression,” we shall find the natural corruption of the human heart, and its effects in the life and conduct, accurately described in the two words rendered “ iniquity ” and “ sin,” which occur in the following verse— “ Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” With this “ threefold

cord, which cannot be broken," but by an act of Divine grace, viz. federal guilt, native corruption, and actual sin, is every child of Adam bound, as with fetters of iron. "Death hath passed upon all men, because all have sinned."¹ "The Scripture hath concluded," shut up as in a prison, "all under sin."² "The wages of sin is death"³ eternal.

Every application for pardon must necessarily be built on some rational ground of hope; and that ground of hope must, of course, be sought in the Scriptures, the only revelation of the will of God, of what He requires from us, and of what He will do for us. And though the penitent in our text refers to the exuberant mercy of Him, against whom we have sinned; yet no consideration of His mercy can bring satisfaction to the afflicted heart of a contrite sinner, independently of a revelation making known the only way in which that mercy can exert itself in its behalf, without compromising other essential perfections of the Divine character. God is just and cannot abandon His rights; He is holy, and with Him iniquity cannot dwell: how then can He save sinners?

This is "the secret of the Lord," which is "with them that fear Him;" this the mystery, the disclosure of which required a revelation

¹ Rom. v. 12.

² Gal. iii. 22.

³ Rom. vi. 33.

from God. This is the great subject of all the revelations made to the Patriarchs, the substance of the typical dispensations, the burden of prophecy, and the grand theme of the New Testament Scriptures. If sin be a debt due to a creditor who cannot relinquish his claims on his debtors without obscuring and even abandoning his own character; then a surety, willing and responsible for the discharge of that debt, must be introduced into the transaction. Such a surety is revealed in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ; who is authorised to address the universal Creditor of mankind, and say, in relation to the contrite sinner who believes in Himself, “ Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom;” a ransom to which justice cannot object, a payment of the debt in its utmost amount with which righteousness must be fully satisfied. That David was acquainted with this Divine Surety, other Psalms, prophetic of His office and character, abundantly testify. And indeed, without faith in Him, though sin may occasion remorse and a dread of punishment, the remembrance of it cannot be accompanied with that “ Godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of.”¹ In order that the conscience of a true penitent may be pacified, the debt must be obliterated by

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

the same hand that inscribed its memorial ; and a full discharge be given on the ground of the surety's payment of the debt incurred.

If we adopt the notion of blotting out guilt, introduced in Isaiah, to which we have before adverted,—that of removing the obstruction to the light of the sun in the heavens, which a dark cloud produces ; then we have to consider that light, an emanation from the sun, as dispersing and sweeping away the intervening cloud. “ I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins.” The act of removing the vail, is the act of Him whose face had been hidden from the sinner ; for as the sun and its emanation are one substance, so is Christ the brightness of the glory of God ;¹ and His rays scatter and banish that which intercepts between the sight of God and the penitent soul. A recovery of Divine favour is the grand object of desire to those who are made conscious of its value and of its forfeiture. “ In Thy favour is life,” is the devout and anxious language of every awakened mind. Guilt, natural and acquired, constitutes the impenetrable vail which separates between God and the contrite sinner ; and the mediation of Christ, the light of life, is regarded as the only agency by which the dense vail can be swept away. “ Lift thou up, O Lord, the light of thy countenance upon me !”

¹ Heb. i. 3.

Let us consider

3dly. THE MEASURE OR RULE, ACCORDING TO WHICH A PENITENT SINNER DESIRES TO BE DEALT WITH IN THE EXPECTED ANSWER TO HIS PRAYER. He says, “Have mercy upon me, O God, *according to Thy loving-kindness ; according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies*, blot out my transgression.”

The revealed rule of God’s dealing with repentant sinners is described by the Psalmist in a two-fold manner ; both expressing the conviction he felt of the dreadful nature of sin, and both expressing the view which faith in Divine Revelation afforded him of the exuberance of Divine compassion. The latter expression however rises in force above the former : though both convey to the mind what St. Paul has more explicitly stated, that to Divine love may be ascribed a height and depth, a length and breadth, surpassing the utmost stretch of the human understanding.¹

The Psalmist prays to be dealt with, in the important and awful transaction between his soul and God respecting the pardon of his sin, according to the “loving kindness” of the Divine Lawgiver. The word, when descriptive of personal character, is sometimes used as an epithet connected with God, and describes Him as the

¹ Eph. iii. 18.

fountain of mercy, or an ocean of grace. Sometimes it is connected with the God-Man Mediator, and describes the channel in which the grace of God flows,—a channel deep and wide beyond conception. And sometimes it describes penitent believers, as recipients of that mercy which flows to them from the bosom of their heavenly Father through the mediation of His incarnate Son. We have an instance of this latter application of the term, in a participial form, Psalm xxxii. 6, where the Psalmist, after describing his own experience in the same transaction with God to which our present Psalm relates, adds, “For this shall every one that is *godly*,”—every partaker of mercy, “make his prayer unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found.” The grace of God is preventing grace:—it is itself the prompter of those petitions which it grants. It is “the Spirit of grace who maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, that He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”¹

How delightful a subject for devout meditation is this co-operation of the Persons of the Godhead, in effecting the salvation of sinners! The grace of the Father provided, and has accepted

¹ Rom. viii. 26, 27.

the needful atonement ; the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished the work of propitiation ; and the grace of the Holy Ghost enables us to pray for an interest in that atonement, and then reveals it, in all its freeness and sufficiency, to the afflicted heart. Thus is the life that is restored to a sinner, in every point of view, “ the life of God in the soul of man.”

But we return to our more immediate subject, Divine “loving kindness.” The term seems, literally, to import a confluence of streams to form one vast river. And is not this the view which faith takes of Divine grace—a river deep and wide which is formed by a confluence of all the perfections of the Godhead? Omnipotence, omniscience, infinite justice and holiness, all flow into this “river of the water of life.” Here “Mercy and truth meet together ; righteousness and peace embrace each other.” The dazzling colours which make up the character of that infinite Being with whom we have to do, are blended and softened into the emerald rainbow which surrounds His throne of grace.¹

That a penitent, feeling the guilt of sin in his conscience, and standing as a trembling criminal at the bar of his Judge, should use, in making his appeal to the compassion of that Judge, the strongest expressions he could find, is to be

¹ Rev. iv. 3.

expected. That he should multiply such expressions is natural. A contrite sinner, when imploring pardon, becomes eloquent. The suppliant proceeds therefore to appeal to God's "tender mercies." And not content with using the strongest word for compassion, which language afforded him, he introduces an epithet to heighten the effect, and appeals to "the multitude of God's tender mercies."

It is worthy of remark, that David makes no reference throughout this Psalm to his former character and well-conducted life; to his services in the church of God, or to the rank and station which he held in society. Divine compassion is, exclusively, the plea he urges. And this is, in all cases, a characteristic of true penitence. It excludes all idea of merit or even of condignity. It brings forward no alleviating circumstances to extenuate the amount of guilt contracted. It can derive no comfort from the blasphemous figment of a remedial law, which represents God as lowering the demands of His holiness to meet the necessities of his sinful creatures. It admits that the law is "holy, just, and good."¹ It secures to that law the honour to which it is entitled as the law of God. Its appeal is to Divine mercy, flowing in the channel of that redemption which has provided for the

¹ Rom. vii. 12.

payment of the utmost penalty of the law by the sufferings of a Divine surety ; and for the righteousness which the precept immutably requires, by the obedience of Him, who is therefore called “ Jehovah our Righteousness.” ¹

When St. Paul, in his first Epistle to Timothy, is speaking of his own character, he is not content with calling himself a sinner, but he stigmatizes himself as “ the chief.” And then he adds, “ Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me, *the chief*” (the foremost in guilt and demerit) “ Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.” ² Similar was the estimate which the penitent in our text took of himself : and such also, while contemplating the corruption of the heart, is the estimate of true penitence in every instance of its existence.

When the Psalmist appeals to “ *the multitude* of God’s mercies,” are we to consider him as appealing to the multiplied instances of Divine compassion which he had himself experienced ; or to the “ patterns of mercy” which the past history of the church had, even then, furnished ? Perhaps he had both in his view. A penitent sinner catches at every argument which may encourage hope and inspire confidence. And

¹ Jer. xxiii. 6.

² 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

though his sheet anchor is the Divine record concerning “the hope set before us in the Gospel;” every exemplification of success in laying hold of it is valuable to him. He looks to his own past experience, and accounts the long suffering of God to be salvation; and while he is conscious that “the goodness of God,” in His providential dispensations, “leadeth to repentance,” his hope is further strengthened. And when he contemplates the great cloud of witnesses to the saving grace and power of the Lord Jesus; and that the fund of blessing in Him is undiminished by communication; he is enabled to rejoice in a persuasion of the revealed truth, “Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever.”

But how is the cloud of witnesses increased, how are the patterns of mercy multiplied, since this Psalm was written? Let the penitent survey the stream of grace as it has rolled along, and derive from that survey humiliation and comfort.

But what communion have we with the penitent, whose prayers we hear in our text? What fellowship can subsist between the indifferent and obdurate heart, and the broken spirit of David? What common sympathies can there be in the church on earth between the careless devotee to this present evil world; or the self-justifying spirit of ancient pharisaism, still widely exemplified among persons bearing the Christian name, and joining in Christian services; and the peni-

tent, who in spirit and in truth adopts the language of the publican, and cries, "God be merciful to me, *the* sinner." Christianity, as an habitual principle in the human heart, is made up of humiliation, faith, and love. The question which should arise in every heart is this—AM I A CHRISTIAN ?

PSALM LI. 2.

*Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and
cleanse me from my sin.*

OUR text is a continuation of the prayer which begins with the first verse of the Psalm, and runs through the whole of it. It is closely connected with the petition which precedes it; so that this would be imperfect without the addition to it which we have now to consider. The motives urged in the first verse are to be carried forward to the second; the “loving kindness” of God as revealed to man, and “the multitude of his tender mercies,” being the only ground on which the penitent hopes for success in his prayer, that God would “wash him thoroughly from his iniquity, and cleanse him from his sin.”

It appears that this prayer of David, which we are considering as a model of penitential feeling, was used, and written for the benefit of future applicants at the throne of mercy, after Nathan, on the authority of God, had assured him that the Lord had “put away his sin, and that he should not die.” There is no reason given us to suppose that the criminal had any due sense

of his guilt, till Nathan's parable roused his conscience to sensibility. A mind, so well informed as his was, must indeed have been aware that what he had done was highly offensive to God and injurious to others. But such a conviction of the judgment bears no resemblance to "godly sorrow." The distinction is clearly marked in the 32nd Psalm, written by David on the same occasion; "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." Such was the effect of "the spirit of bondage," "the fear that tormenteth" but humbles not, on his soul; described in terms derived from the consequences of a raging fever on the bodily frame. But the guileless spirit, the broken and the contrite heart, without which the soul is incapable of receiving the blessing of forgiveness,¹ was not yet produced. This is described in the following verse, together with its result in an immediate communication of pardoning mercy:—"I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord;—and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." O wonderful connection between humiliation of heart and the pardoning grace of God—between

¹ Psalm xxxii. 1, 2.

confession and forgiveness. It is, like cause and effect in the ordinary course of nature, a connection which God has established, and which cannot be dissolved. The influence of the Spirit of God resembles that of a sudorific on the body in a fever—it melts the soul—it opens a way for the removal of the disease, and for the restoration of health and strength. The history of this transaction, as recorded 2 Sam. xii. 13, and referred to in the 32nd Psalm, reminds us of the representation made in our Lord's beautiful parable of "the Prodigal Son;" in which the promptness of Divine compassion is illustrated by the conduct of the father in running to meet the contrite son; "while he was yet a great way off." He did not wait till the son had carried his resolution into effect by venturing into his offended father's presence, and making his humble confession there; but the first symptom of restored filial feeling causes the compassion of the father's bowels to yearn over him. Another instance in point occurs in the account of the conversion of St. Paul; no sooner could it be said, "Behold he prayeth," than Ananias was sent to comfort him with assurances of mercy.

But a difficulty connected with our text remains to be removed before we enter on its illustration. If the prayer for pardon and purification contained in this Psalm, was offered after Nathan's message had assured David that the

Lord had put away his sin, and that he should not die; what necessity existed for these repeated and importunate intreaties for blessings which had been already conceded? Two considerations will clear up this apparent inconsistency—The first is the difficulty with which a conscious mind receives and realises the declaration of free mercy. The view which a true penitent takes of the evil of sin, and his comparative ignorance of the infinite value of the atonement, and of the inscrutable goodness of God in providing and accepting it, render the exercise of faith in that atonement and its consequences the most arduous of all the operations to which the mind can apply itself. While the evil of sin, and the purity of the Divine nature, are unfelt, an assent to the general proposition, that “God is merciful,” is readily made: but it is a widely different matter to embrace the proposal of the Gospel, and to rely on the mode of salvation which it reveals, when sin is appreciated in all its malignity, and judgment appears in all its terrors and consequences. And this difficulty is increased by the novelty of the proposition, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” This is so contrary to all the prepossessions of the self-righteous heart, so directly opposed to its natural expectations, that it is often a long while before it is brought to acquiesce fully in the doctrine of salvation by grace, though that doctrine

is so clearly and constantly inculcated in both the old and the new Testament.

A further justification of the penitent's prayer for pardon and purification will be found in this consideration, that, though the act of grace on the part of God is at once free, complete, and irrevocable, the work of purification is a continued work ; and that, though justification is at once perfect and final, yet the sinner's consciousness of it depends on the exercise of faith ; and is therefore, like the tide, subject to ebb and flow : or rather like the light of heaven, liable to be obscured by intervening clouds. The Psalmist's prayer is therefore adapted to the use of every penitent sinner, not only in the first moments of conversion to God, but throughout the whole of his life. He enters his spiritual course with David's cry, " Have mercy upon me, O God," &c. ; and he concludes it in the same manner.

Let me again call your attention to the earnestness of the penitent Psalmist's soul. He was in no danger of being called to an account for his crimes before any earthly tribunal ; for he had no superior on earth. His solicitude arose from a practical belief in God and eternity. But it is high time to return to the words of the text, which will lead us to consider

1. THE EVILS FROM WHICH A TRUE PENITENT IMPLEORES DELIVERANCE—and

2. THE NATURE OF THE DELIVERANCE WHICH HE IMPORES.

1. THE EVILS, &c.

These are described by the words “iniquity” and “sin;” terms which are used as synonymous in our own language, but which in the language wherein the Psalm was written admit of an obvious distinction.

The former of these words properly characterises the innate corruption of the human heart. It signifies, when used in a natural sense, that which is perverted and overturned; as the surface of the earth was at the deluge, by the hand of God;¹ and as he threatened,² that Jerusalem should be on account of its sins. It frequently describes a ruin or a heap of ruins. How just is its appellation to the natural state of the human heart! What is the present state of the heart of man, compared with that in which it was created, but a ruin? All its hopes and prospects are overturned,—all its Divinely implanted principles of piety and charity are perverted,—all its features are distorted,—all that remains to indicate its primitive grandeur, is a heap of rubbish. Such is the description which St. Paul gives of the natural state of the human soul³—the mind is the seat of vanity, the understanding

¹ Isaiah xxiv. 1.

² Ezek. xxi. 27.

³ Eph. iv. 18.

of darkness, and the heart of alienation from the life of God. Hence the necessity for a new birth—a new creation. “The carnal mind is enmity against God : it is not subject to the law of God ; neither indeed can be.”¹

The second term which the Psalmist has used in speaking of the evils from which he sought deliverance, seems properly to describe what we call actual sin. The original word signifies to miss an aim, as an archer does who shoots short of his mark, beyond, or beside it. It is also used for treading aside, or tripping, in the act of walking. In a spiritual sense it denotes deviation from a rule, whether by omission or commission. It includes what we daily confess, when we acknowledge that “we have erred and stayed from God’s way,” that “we have left undone what we ought to have done, and have done what we ought not to have done.” The Apostle explains it, when he says, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”²—have missed the mark which His law has set in our view, and failed of attaining the fruition of God in glory. The word “sin,” therefore describes not only the grosser “pollutions which are in the world through lust ;” but the universal deficiency of duty in regard to both tables of the law ; “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ;

¹ Rom. viii. 7.

² Rom. iii. 23.

and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”
 “Sin is the transgression of the law;”¹ a want of conformity to its high and unalterable requisition of perfect rectitude in heart and life.

There are, then, three views to be taken of that which is the cause of condemnation by the law of God. Sin is imputed, it is communicated, and it is committed. Its imputation and its communication, and the effects of natural corruption in actual sin, all result from our federal connexion with the first Adam. In like manner, from a corresponding connexion with the second Adam, result the imputation of His righteousness, the communication of His regenerating and sanctifying grace, and the fruits of faith in acts of obedience to the law of God.²

Now, an awakened and enlightened sinner, in other words, a true penitent, is taught to trace up the stream of pollution to its fountain head; his acts of sin to a corrupt heart; and the corruption of his heart to his descent from Adam. But this subject will be brought into fuller light, when we arrive at the 5th verse. At present we shall only remark further, that contrition and repentance are imperfect, and inefficacious in producing their proper results, till the above connexion between these effects and their cause is

¹ ἀνομία. 1 John iii. 4.

² See this parallel stated at large by St. Paul, Romans v. 12, &c.

discovered and felt. That soul is not truly humbled which has not been led through this process. While the acts of sin which we confess, are considered as insulated acts, occasioned by temptation, our humiliation is very imperfect; and while we look no further than to the guilt and pollution of occasional transgression, we can discern no necessity for such an atonement as that which has been made by the Son of God, nor the further necessity of the regenerating and new-creating grace of His Holy Spirit. Hence while the Pelagian denies this necessity in both its branches; he also, with perfect consistency, denies the imputation of guilt and the communication of corrupt principle.

We now proceed to consider—

2dly. THE NATURE OF THE DELIVERANCE WHICH THE PENITENT IMploRES.

“*Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*” It is *thorough* purification which the contrite soul solicits; and he solicits the blessing from God, who alone has the power to effect it.

Both the verbs which the Psalmist has introduced into his prayer imply this. The former is never used for washing merely the surface of that to which it is applied. The Scriptures employ another word in describing an external ablution. The term employed in our text always refers to an operation which pervades the substance of

that which requires its application. Thus, it is used for the act of the fuller, who scours that which is submitted to his process. The other word is equally expressive and instructive. It is applied not only to ceremonial purification; but also to that of metals from the dross which is naturally combined with their substance, by the agency of fire.

The penitent in our text, not content with the employment of verbs strongly expressing the conviction he felt of the total corruption of his nature, and of the necessity of almighty interposition for producing the purification he needed, adds an epithet, which is to be connected with both the clauses of our text. “Wash me *thoroughly* from mine iniquity,—cleanse me *thoroughly* from my sin.” He felt that the heart is the fountain of sin; and that the heart must be regenerate before its streams, in thought, word, and deed, can be acceptable to Him who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men.

The adverb in our text may be considered as referring to a repetition or continuation of the act which the verb expresses, as well as to its efficiency. The Psalmist’s prayer might have been rendered—‘Multiply to wash me, &c.’—‘Repeat the act, continue the operation till the full effect be produced.’ One branch of the benefit implored, is, as we shall proceed to show, of a gradual and progressive nature. It requires

according to the established mode of Divine procedure, a continued influence of Divine mercy. What this benefit is, we proceed to inquire.

It consists, *first*, in purification from the guilt of sin by the vouchsafement of pardon. This is the primary object of a penitent's concern ; because, till this be obtained, he is exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation. He is acquainted with the curse of the Divine law, and is conscious that it hangs over his guilty head. As a descendant of the first Adam, as born in sin, and as an actual transgressor, he is a child of wrath. Pardon must be obtained, or he must for ever be banished from the presence of God into the "outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." He has now within his own bosom a conviction that Divine favour, and communion with the "Greatest and Best" of beings, are essential to the happiness of a rational creature—that fellowship with God is heaven, and that banishment from Him is Hell ; and he therefore implores the removal of that which has separated him from God, and has produced a foretaste of hell, into a consciousness of that separation, in his own soul. "God be merciful to me a sinner," is the first expression of Divine life communicated by regenerating grace, as is more fully shown by the eleventh verse of this Psalm.

But there is another reason for the precedence

which pardoning mercy takes in the humble suit of a sinner. Not only must the sinner be pardoned, before he can be admitted to favour ; not only must the outlaw be reinstated in his civil rights, before he can stand in his sovereign's presence ; but, in the established order of Divine procedure, the benefit of pardon holds the first place, because it is the apprehension of this benefit by faith, that is the means of sanctification. It is this that destroys the love and power of sin, and engages the heart for God. " Faith worketh by love." Sanctification results from discoveries made to the heart of " the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This destroys the enmity of the carnal mind against God : this kindles love to Him who first loved us.

There are two points which must be made clear to the mind of a penitent, before he can enjoy peace with God. The one is, that God can be just, and so be glorified in pardoning sin and justifying the ungodly. The enlightened sinner cannot be satisfied with general statements about the benignity of the Divine character. He must have learned on the authority of a revelation from God, that His perfections harmonize in the Gospel plan ; that His justice is satisfied, and that His law is honoured by the sufferings and obedience of the appointed mediator ; or he cannot indulge the hope of pardon and acceptance with God. It is in proportion as he discerns the

wisdom and equity, the righteousness and holiness, of the Gospel salvation, that his soul is enabled to lay hold of the hope of everlasting life.

There is a second point in Christian experience, which often most painfully and for a long time exercises the mind of a sincere penitent. ‘Am I interested, personally, in the grace of Christ? Have I any share in the virtue of that blood which cleanseth from all sin? I have no doubt of that virtue; but may I consider it as efficacious *for me?*’ This hesitation in making a personal application of that provision which God has made for the wants of all who feel their need of it, arises chiefly from a consciousness of innate and indwelling corruption, which, like a stream into whose channel some obstruction has been thrown, rages the more in consequence of the opposition it receives. The discoveries made to the penitent heart, of the spiritual, and the unalterable character of the Divine law, produce a similar effect in the awakened conscience. Thus it was in the experience of St. Paul: “when the commandment came,” (viz. in its spirituality and condemning power) “sin revived and I died.”¹ The humble believer cannot at once see that this is the plan of Divine wisdom, and that this hesitation is permitted for the pur-

¹ Rom. vii. 9.

pose of promoting greater humiliation, of cutting up by the roots the system of self-righteousness which is natural to man, so that not a fibre may be left to mar the glory of the grace of God. The putrefying sores are thus probed to the bottom, in order that their cure may be radical and complete.

The folly of some empirics in religion, who laugh at the inward afflictions of the penitent sinner as needless, and as the effect of a disturbed imagination; and who would send such an one to the amusements of the world for relief from his distress, and the cure of a malady which lies deep within his soul;—is apparent in every verse of this Psalm. The guilt of sin is not an imaginary burden; a wounded conscience is not a fancied evil: the wrath of God is not a painted storm. Should a present temporary effect be produced by a recommendation of worldly amusement, what is that effect but an accumulation “of wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” The wound may indeed be skinned over; but the original cause which produced it remains. It must break out again, and that when it is too late to apply the only effectual remedy afforded by the Gospel of Christ.

But there is also a second kind of purification which the true penitent needs and implores, besides the purification of his conscience from the

guilt of sin to be effected by the virtue of the blood of atonement. He is conscious of incapacity for the enjoyment of communion with God, though access to it has been made by the cross of Christ. He is conscious of inability to love and serve God, according to those spiritual views of claims, arising from creation and redemption, which now engage his heart. "He would do good ; but evil is present with him ; he loves the law of God after the inner man ; but he finds another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin that is in his members."¹ This gives occasion for incessant prayer, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

He has now learned a secret to which the carnal mind is a stranger, that holiness and happiness are correlative terms : that, as God only can fill up and satisfy the desires of an immortal soul, He can only do this by making the soul "a partaker of His holiness." And this is not a theoretic opinion founded on report ; but it is a practical conclusion, the result of experience. "The message" which St. John has declared, as received by a divine revelation, is interwoven with the consciousness of the renewed soul : "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we

¹ Rom. vii. 21, &c.

say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin.”¹ The sanctification of His people, or their reconformity to His own image, is the great and ultimate object, subordinate only to His own glory, which God has proposed to himself in redemption, grace, and glory.

The holiness to which a penitent sinner prays that he may be restored, while he implores purification from the corruption of his heart, and from its fruits in his life, does not, merely or primarily, consist in an ability to abstain from overt acts of transgression, or to perform the outward duties which the law requires. It is “a new heart,” and “a right spirit,” as appears from the 10th verse, that is the object of his solicitude. But on this subject we shall have to dilate, when we discuss the verse to which a reference has just been made.

We have already observed that the work of sanctification is a continued work. To its accomplishment all the means of grace which God has appointed in His church, and all the afflictions with which he visits his people, are subservient. Every ordinance of Gospel worship,

¹ 1 John i. 5—7.

and every distressing dispensation of Divine providence, proclaims, in language which the penitent sinner is learning to understand, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." And so far as he understands the language of Divine goodness, he is enabled to "kiss the rod, and to adore the hand that employs it for his spiritual benefit."

The blessing of purification from the love and power of sin always accompanies deliverance from its guilt ; and as these blessings are never separated, the one from the other, in a communication of grace ; so are desires after them always united in the experience and prayers of penitent sinners. The desires of a contrite soul are in strict accordance with the purposes of Divine mercy, and the promises of God's word. The same gracious Spirit who has revealed the purposes of God, and recorded the promises which emanate from those purposes, is the author of prayer. "We," of ourselves, "know not what we should pray for as we ought ; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, that He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."¹ Alas ! how many professors of religion cultivate a vague desire after

¹ Romans viii. 26, 27.

a deliverance from the punishment of sin in the wrath to come, who feel no desire and make no effort to obtain that which is inseparable from such a deliverance—even that “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord !”¹

If this desire after a purification of the heart be a necessary symptom of true repentance ; if this be essential to a state of pardon and acceptance with God ; if this be a qualification for the enjoyment of His favour ; if this be eternal life begun in the soul, its first principle, the first motion of the heart in spiritual resuscitation ;—then how important is the inquiry, Am I thus “made alive unto God ?”—Am I conscious that “in His favour is life,” and am I supremely anxious to be qualified for its enjoyment ? A man may regret that he has brought himself into danger of misery in hell, without having any taste for that which constitutes the happiness of heaven.

Faith in the blood of Christ as the atonement for sin, “crucifies the flesh with its affections and lusts,”² raises the heart to God, and “sets the affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.”³ “He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”⁴

From this part of the Psalmist’s prayer, the

¹ Heb. xii. 14.

² Coloss. iii. 2.

³ Gal. v. 24.

⁴ 1 John iii. 3.

nature of sin is made evident. It endangers, it debases, it defiles, it destroys. Pardon and regeneration are essential to an escape from these its natural effects. It is the leprosy of the inner man. It renders the soul unfit for communion with a holy God, and His holy church.—It defiles every thing with which it comes in contact—and unless the disease be healed, it must prove fatal.

Well might the wise man say, that “fools make a mock at sin.” None but a fool would treat it with levity: to do so is the quintessence of folly. To trifle with sin is to trifle with the atonement for it, and with the “Holy Ghost who sanctifieth all the elect people of God.” How near such a state of folly approaches to theirs, who “trample under foot the Son of God, count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of Grace,”—let those whom it concerns well consider;—but let them remember that for such “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin.”¹ The rejection of Christ is necessarily fatal.

The wisdom of a penitential frame of mind is as evident as the folly of making a mock at sin: indeed, it is the converse of that folly; for every man, but the penitent believer, does make light of sin. Is it not wisdom to weigh accurately the

¹ Hebrews x. 26.

nature and certain consequences of a disease with which I am afflicted, while there remains a possibility of obtaining a remedy? Who but a fool would neglect it? Is it not wisdom to submit to the means which are necessary for restoration to health, though those means may be, for a time, painful and distressing? “Blessed are they that hunger now; for they shall be filled: blessed are they that weep now; for they shall laugh. But woe unto them that are full; for they shall hunger: woe unto them that laugh now; for they shall mourn and weep.”¹ Such are the decisive declarations of Him who is “the Amen—the faithful and true Witness.” May they sink down into our hearts, and become the means of comforting the mourner, and of alarming the trifler—God grant it for Jesus Christ’s sake—Amen.

¹ Luke vi. 24, 25.

PSALM LI. 3.

*For I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin
is ever before me.*

THE two former verses of this Psalm have passed under our review, in which we have been led to consider the fervent application to the Throne of Grace made by one who was a great sinner and a great penitent ;—one whose crimes had exceeded the usual measure of criminality, and whose sorrow, shame, and self-abhorrence, were deep and lasting. The case, here recorded, is calculated to preclude both presumption and despair. It marks strongly the folly of those who say to themselves, “ Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound,” or who act on this principle: and, at the same time, it prohibits any conclusion, arising from a sense of the evil of sin, that sin committed admits of no remedy, that it is out of the reach of the great atonement, and excludes the sinner from any hope of mercy.

Perhaps the words now read should have been considered in immediate connexion with those that precede them. But we found so much im-

portant matter in the petitions of the two first verses, that time would not allow of our adding to them the argument with which the penitent sinner enforces them, which is contained in our present text. We were obliged therefore to reserve them for a separate subject of meditation.

We shall consider—

1. THE CONNEXION OF OUR TEXT WITH THE PRECEDING VERSES; and,

2. THE CONFESSION WHICH IT CONTAINS.

1. The connexion of our text with the preceding verses is evident. The penitent had implored mercy and forgiveness of his sins. In our text he reasons with Him to whom his prayer is addressed, on the awful subject. His reasoning is the exercise of faith in the promises of God's word, and is founded on His covenant of redemption. It indicates humiliation and hope. It is an argument adduced for the purpose of strengthening the penitent's application for mercy.

This is the force of the argumentative particle "*for*," with which our text opens. "*For* I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me.

God, indeed, does not want our arguments and pleas. He is fully acquainted with the case we have to state in all its bearings, before we make it known. "He is more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than either we

desire or deserve." He "waiteth to be gracious." Our exercises of faith and hope are the result of previous merciful determinations in the bosom of our Covenant God concerning us. But it is, nevertheless, our duty and privilege to argue the case with Him. He delights in hearing such reasonings as that in our text. It suits the purposes of his mercy, and tends to the honour of his name. It is calculated to increase humiliation and faith in the heart that is so employed.

The instance of the Syrophenician woman plainly shows, how acceptable is such holy argumentation to Him to whom it is addressed. Here, an opportunity that cannot be silenced, a perseverance which cannot be subdued, earnestness that will admit of no denial, are exertions that become our situation, and the character of Him with whom we have to do. If our argumentative plea be scriptural, suited to the posture of mind in which we present it at the footstool of the throne of grace, it cannot be urged too strongly, nor be persisted in too long.

But what is the penitent's plea? Does he say, "God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are?" Does he urge his past services, or promise amendment in respect to acknowledged deficiency? Nothing of the kind is to be discovered in the lengthened prayer of the royal penitent, nor in the shorter suit of the contrite

publican. In both instances the appeal made is exclusively addressed to Divine mercy, to Divine mercy as revealed to sinful man.

This, then, is the argument employed ; “ Thou hast promised forgiveness of sins, however aggravated, to all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe Thy holy Gospel. Thou hast said, ‘ He that hideth his sins shall not prosper ; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy.’ Thy promise cannot be broken. Thou art the God of truth. While therefore I implore pardon, I acknowledge my transgression, and as a sinner, conscious of being such, I implore mercy in the way in which Thou hast promised to bestow it, through the atoning merit of Him who hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.”

Though, in the time of David, this great and only sacrifice for sin had not been actually offered ; it had been accepted, prospectively, in the purpose of God, and was the only basis of hope to the penitent sinner. In prophetic declarations and promises ; in the blood and smoke of his animal victims laid on the altar of God who required these typical oblations ; the penitent sinner, under the Patriarchal and Levitical dispensations, saw the Divine plan for saving sinners clearly set before him, and rejoiced in it. That David understood it, we learn from St. Paul’s

testimony concerning him.¹ That Abraham saw the day of Christ, our Lord Himself hath told us.² And with the clue which prophecy afforded, the acts, required in the typical representation, were abundantly sufficient to direct the sinner to his Saviour; and to afford him a solid ground for the hope of forgiveness and salvation. It is not then any inference which the mind can draw from the natural attributes of God; it is not any plea derived from the acceptableness of repentance, considered apart from atonement, that has ever afforded, or ever can afford, relief to the burdened conscience; but that relief is to be looked for in the revelation which God has made of Himself in the Gospel of His dear Son.

We are now to consider—

2. THE CONFESSION OF SIN CONTAINED IN THE WORDS BEFORE US—"I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me."

This confession consists of two parts; the latter rising in meaning, and expressing more fully the feelings of contrition which the speaker wished to convey.

The verb in the first clause may express either consciousness or confession, as it is often used to denote the former.³ Consciousness of guilt must

¹ Romans iv. 6.

² John viii. 56. Bishop Warburton supposes that our Lord particularly alludes to the scene on Mount Moriah.

³ Compare Judges viii. 16. and Proverbs xxiii. 25.

accompany confession of it, or the confession is a provocation offered to the Searcher of hearts. Contrition is an inward perception of the guilt, turpitude, and misery of a state of sin; as being a state of alienation from God, of incapacity for the enjoyment of His favour, and of exposure to His wrath. It is the agonized experience of the soul, quickened by Divine power to new sensibilities; and struggling, in the process of resuscitation, between life and death. It may seem unnecessary to remark, that consciousness is the parent of that confession to which the promise of pardon is made. But it is important to distinguish between a recital of the confession of our church by the lips only, and the humiliation of heart to which it is intended to give utterance; or, between a mere conviction of the judgment founded on the letter of Scripture, that our state and character are such as are therein described, and that painful consciousness of its truth which is necessary in order to produce sincerity and fervour in the prayer that follows —“ Have mercy upon us, *miserable* offenders.” May it not be feared, without any breach of charity, that many professed worshippers use words expressive of a contrite spirit, and are perhaps convinced in their judgment, that the picture they draw of themselves is just in all its features; whose hearts have no communion with their own lips in the act of confession, and consequently none with the true members of the church of God?

But while it must be maintained that confession of sin without an inward consciousness of its guilt, and of the danger to which it exposes, is an awful mockery of the Divine Majesty ; it must also be maintained that this inward consciousness of sin will, of necessity, be productive of confession. Let us again refer to the 32d Psalm, as corroborative and illustrative of our text. “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long ; for day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me : my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid : I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord ; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” The wound for a time festered ; and the anguish which the inflammatory process occasioned was intolerable. At length the ulcer burst, and relief immediately followed. Similar is the language of the New Testament. “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” In the forgiveness of sins, when they are duly felt and acknowledged, God acts in faithfulness to His own promises ; and in justice to Him “in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen.” The atonement having been made, the blessing cannot be withheld, without a breach of covenant engagements, from those who, by the quickening grace of the Holy Spirit, are prepared to welcome it.

Our text shews us to whom confession of sin is to be addressed; before whom (to use the expressive phrase of another Psalm) we are to “pour out our hearts,” to empty them of all their bitter corroding contents, so as to leave nothing behind. The whole Psalm is an address to a Covenant God, and it is to Him that confession is to be made. “I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord.” Publicly and privately, in the secret exercises of the heart, and in union with the faithful, in expressing what is felt within, a penitent will adopt the humble suit of a sinner. His closet, the house of God, and even his necessary converse with the world, will afford evidence of the state of his heart, and breathe the spirit of the lowly publican—“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

The pages of Scripture are utter strangers to the doctrine of auricular confession to a priest; as they are also to many other absurd and wicked traditions of the Romish church. The Romanist may be challenged to produce a single passage justifying such a requisition; which is abhorrent from all the proprieties subsisting in social life, and productive of incalculable evil both to the confessed and the confessor. If the Apostle St. James be referred to¹ as enjoining such a practice, its advocate must prove, in order to

¹ James v. 16.

make the injunction bear on his point, that “one to another”¹ means, “the laic to the priest;” but till this is proved, the Apostle’s direction is wholly irrelevant to the subject. But the church of Rome asserts herself to be the sole interpreter of Scripture, and she determines that auricular confession is enjoined by the words of St. James! Common sense may reject the interpretation; but common sense must yield to an infallible interpreter.

But we return to Protestant views and feelings on the subject before us. We have remarked that confession must be the offspring of consciousness, in order that it may be available in obtaining mercy. Therefore the Psalmist subjoins to his declaration (a declaration founded on experience) of the blessedness of the man “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, and to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity,”—that in his “spirit there is no guile,” which is explained as referring to confession of sin by what he says of himself in the following verses. The guileless spirit of a penitent is not only a crucified martyr on account of sin, but it is also a living confessor that the Divine law is “holy,

¹ The Apostle’s language implies reciprocity. The requisition of mutual confession, and that of mutual prayer, refers to the same persons. *Δικαιον* is without the article, and there is nothing in the whole verse to restrict the duties enforced, and the privilege asserted, to the person of a priest.

just, and good :” holy and good in its requisitions, and just in the penalty it denounces. A spirit without guile is not a state of sinlessness, but a heart forming a true and scriptural estimate of its own state, and acting accordingly.

Let it not be supposed that this contrite state of heart is limited to the first period of Christian experience. It is the Christian character, the daily evidence of Divine life in the soul of man. It accompanies the Christian in all his devotional exercises, public and private. It accompanies him into all the intercourse of common life, and the avocations of daily business. It is the vibration of the renewed heart, the circulation of the vital principle of Divine grace through the arteries and veins of the new man. It is the inspiration and the expiration of the spiritual organ, by which communion with God is maintained in the soul. It will show itself, according to its degree of prevalence, by devout reverence towards God, humility in our intercourse with our fellow creatures, circumspection in our words and conduct, and a watchfulness over the motions of our hearts ; so that the church, and even the world, must take knowledge of the penitent believer that he has been at the foot of the cross,—that he has chosen and fixed his station for life at the footstool of the mercy-seat.

It will be observed that contrition and confession, in the view which we have taken of these

exercises of the heart and lips, are considered as connected with the exercise of faith in Divine mercy ; and consequently in the only channel through which that mercy flows. Indeed, without faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, emotions of repentance towards God can have no motive and no aim. What motive can exist to that affectionate regard to God which repentance implies, till some views of His pardoning mercy arise in the mind ? What object can repentance propose to itself, unless pardon of sin be within its reach ? Mark the attitude and conduct of the penitent during the Levitical period. See, he places his hands on the head of his burnt-offering, confessing his sins in this posture of mind and body, and transferring them to his appointed sacrifice. Thence learn the corresponding attitude of every penitent soul. In confessing his sins, he looks to Jesus the antitypical oblation. He contemplates His sufferings as substitutionary and propitiatory. And while faith endeavours to transfer the intolerable burden to Him, the remembrance of sin is grievous, hateful, and abasing. True repentance can be produced and maintained no where but under the shadow of the cross of Christ. Remorse may be produced independently of hope in Christ. “ Devils ” and lost souls “ believe and tremble.” They feel the consequence of sin ; but the experience is unmingled with love. It is not “ Godly sorrow ”—that

sorrow which implies a supreme and grateful regard to God, and which is essential to that “repentance which is not to be repented of.”

This connexion between repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, is established by all the representations on the subject, which we find scattered through the Scriptures. Omitting for the present the figurative testimonies of the ceremonial institute, we may remember that it was a sight of the Lord Jesus on His throne of grace and glory, which caused the evangelical prophet to exclaim,—“Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts.”¹ This agrees with the representation made by the Prophet Jeremiah of the repentance of Israel.—The speaker is Jehovah—“Surely I have heard Ephraim, bemoaning himself thus,—Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for Thou art the Lord my God. Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.”² With this corresponds also the account which the Prophet Zechariah has given of the conversion of the

¹ Isaiah vi. 5.

² Jeremiah xxxi. 18, 19.

Jews at a period yet future, of which a specimen was given on the day of Pentecost; "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born."¹ Let us remark the process described. The Spirit of grace is poured out, and then follows penitent supplication for mercy. The eye is directed to a crucified Saviour, and then follows "Godly sorrow," sincere, abiding, and pungent mourning for Him who "was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." So also St. John,—referring to this prediction of Zechariah: "Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him."² The wail of lamentation is produced by a sight of the once crucified, but then glorified Redeemer of man. It has been remarked that Peter's tears flowed first from the eyes of Christ. Christ looked on Peter, as he stood in the hall of judgment. It was a look of kindness and tender reproach. Then, and not till then, Peter felt the ingratitude and baseness of his sin in

¹ Zechariah xii. 10.

² Revelations i. 7.

denying his gracious Master. Then, and not till then, “ he went out and wept bitterly.”

What shall we say of many instances of what is called a death-bed repentance? Are they instances of conversion to God? Will they stand the test of a Scriptural examination? Will they be found available in the day of God? The minister of grace often has his fears of a disappointment in such cases. He has observed that, in frequent instances of recovery, the religious paroxysm has proved “ like the morning cloud, or the early dew.” The professed penitent has returned to the world with as great avidity after it as he before manifested; he has thrown off the mask which sickness had imposed. We tremble in those instances, where no previous evidence has been afforded of a converted state, lest the acquiescence in the prospect of death, which frequently appears, should be nothing more than a weariness of life produced by present sufferings; or, on the other hand, lest the fear of death should fail of issuing in Godly sorrow for sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus for pardon and salvation. We often fear lest the satisfaction which is expressed in the approach of dissolution, and even the joy which sometimes accompanies it, should be nothing more than a sort of tranquillity occasioned by the languor of disease, and the expectation of deliverance from pain. We can only warn the sufferer of his danger, (often

an afflictive task), and, in case of his departure, hope that all may have been well at the last. We know that nothing is impossible with God.

We must now briefly advert to the second clause of our text, in which the penitent expresses still more strongly the afflicted state of his soul ; he adds, “ My sin is ever before me.”

There is a spurious relief, obtained by many persons who have been conscious of alarm after some overt act of transgression, in consequence of an obliteration from the memory of the heinousness of the sin committed, and the bitterness of the first moments of remorse ; and this is too often mistaken for that relief, which flows from the exercise of faith in the atoning blood of Christ. The sin is supposed to be pardoned, because the afflictive sense of its guilt is removed from the mind ; or, in other words, because it is forgotten. Let us beware of this common, but awful blunder ; a blunder the more awful because it is a symptom of spiritual death, super-added to those which before existed. The influence of the word of God in the production of temporary remorse, may be compared to galvanic action on a corpse. The latter, like the former, produces temporary motion in the system to which it is applied ; but that motion affords no evidence of restored life. The effect of both is temporary, the process of corruption proceeds, and all the consequences of death follow.

We have no means of ascertaining how long after Nathan's visit to David this Psalm was written ; but it is not to be doubted that it was his manual of penitential devotion to his dying day ; and that he united with the beautiful confession of his faith, uttered a little before his departure,¹ the humbling language of our text, " My sin is ever before me." It furnishes a suitable preface to the declaration of his hope in the prospect of eternity, " He hath made with me, (or rather, perhaps, *for* me), an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure : This is all my salvation and all my desire."

The confession in the Communion Service of our church is intended for the use and to express the feelings, not of the young convert only, but also of the aged believer. There is nothing in it which is inconsistent with the strongest faith and the liveliest emotions of hope in Divine mercy. " We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against Thy Divine Majesty ; provoking most justly Thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings ; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us ; the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, Have mercy

¹ 2 Samuel xxiii. 5.

upon us, Most Merciful Father ; For Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past ; and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please Thee in newness of life, to the honour and glory of Thy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Thus the penitent member of the church of England joins with the penitent member of the church of Israel, in saying, "My sin is ever before me." But oh ! let the communicant who adopts the words of this confession as his own, inquire, Do they really describe the sensibilities of my heart ? Do I sympathize with penitents in their sorrows ? Is "the remembrance of sin grievous" *to me*, and is its "burden intolerable," so that I am constrained to throw it off at the foot of the cross ; and am I thankful that I am permitted and enabled to do so ?

Sorrow for sin then is not a transient feeling. It is habitual to the regenerate soul. It is mingled with all the exercises of faith in the atonement, and with all his hopes of future glory. The penitent does not wish to be freed from it, if he could be ; but he cannot. He has an hourly remembrancer in his own bosom, while he feels that sin yet dwelleth in him. A continual consciousness of defect in his love to God, the constantly occurring temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh, the failure of spirituality in all his thoughts, words, and actions, remind him

that he is a sinner, and often bring before his eyes his past transgressions, in awful review. This keeps him humble, bows down his soul into the dust before God, and makes the name of Jesus precious to him. Like the sinful woman in the Gospel, who washed the feet of our Lord with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head; he loves much, because much has been forgiven him.

How great a misery is a dead conscience; if such a phrase may be allowed, which seems to be a contradiction in terms. Conscience is feeling; and when it is quickened to a performance of its appointed office, its language is that which we have borrowed from the Communion Service of our church. But how many among those who profess themselves members of that church, have consciences which are sunk into a sleep which resembles death. But it is only a resemblance. Conscience will hereafter awake. It will constitute the gnawing worm that never dies. It will, incessantly and for ever, bear witness of the guilt and folly which are united in a neglect of the "great salvation."

Let none then try to stifle the murmurs of conscience, to lull its reviving sensibilities. These are symptoms of returning life; while their converse is a proof of a present death in trespasses and sins, and a prelude to eternal banishment from God, which is the second death.

64 LECTURES ON THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM.

Let the believer be thankful that he has been taught to regard sin in its true character. Let him not regret those painful moments which instruct him to hate it, and to seek a refuge from it, while a refuge may be found. Let him call to mind the words of another Psalm: "They that sow in tears shalt reap in joy. He that now goeth on his way weeping, bearing precious seed," (sowing the seed of Godly sorrow, the harvest of which will be eternal joy) "shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."¹

¹ Psalm cxxvi. 5, 6.

PSALM LI. 4.

Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.

BISHOP Horsley has a note on this verse, to which a reference has been already made when we were entering on an exposition of the Psalm ; in which he says, “ That this Psalm was not written upon the occasion to which the title refers, is evident from the 4th and 18th verses. The fourth verse ill suits the case of David, who laid a successful plot against Uriah’s life, after he had defiled his bed.” This objection to the usual application of this penitential formulary to the case of David, is founded on the restrictive adverb which the writer has introduced in speaking of his sin : “ Against THEE ONLY have I sinned.” But if this excludes the sins of David from being the subject of the Psalm, it must, I conceive, for the same reason, exclude the sins of the Jews, to which the Bishop refers the confession ; for surely, their sins, and especially their great sin of crucifying the Son of God,

have been offences against both tables of the law. Their great sin, for instance, was a sin against Pilate and the Romans, whom they tempted and forced, as far as sin can be made a matter of force, to the commission of murder. They sinned against their brethren in distant cities, and against the Gentiles whom they prejudiced against the faith of Christ. They sinned against the Apostles and Evangelists, whom they persecuted even unto Death. And they have continued in the same uncharitable spirit against the Christian name and cause to our own day, though they have lost the power of carrying into execution the “ threatenings and slaughter ” which, at the rise of Christianity, they breathed against the disciples of Jesus. I see no difficulty in admitting the Bishop’s supposition, that this Psalm was prophetically recorded for the use of the converted Jews, when they shall, at their final restoration, have been converted to the faith of Christ. It seems to be exactly suited to express the feelings which we may expect to be excited in their bosoms, when they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, appearing in His glory. But I think we shall be able to remove the learned critic’s objection to the general belief, that David wrote this confession, primarily, in reference to his own sins.

In the former verse the royal penitent had declared his consciousness of heinous guilt, and

had made a general confession of the afflicted state of his heart which that consciousness produced. In the verse to which our attention is now to be directed, he aggravates the evil he had committed, and justifies God in His denunciations of righteous displeasure against it. We shall consider, then, more fully these two points :

1. THE PARTICULAR AND AGGRAVATING VIEW WHICH A PENITENT TAKES OF SIN. "AGAINST THEE, THEE ONLY, HAVE I SIN-
NED, AND DONE THIS EVIL IN THY SIGHT."

2. HIS JUSTIFICATION OF THE CHARACTER AND DISPENSATIONS OF GOD—" *That Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest and be clear when thou judgest.*"

1. THE PARTICULAR AND AGGRAVATING VIEW, &c.

From the emphatic manner in which the penitent speaks of his sin in this verse, when he calls it "this," or *the* "evil," it seems plain that his mind was immediately fixed on the gross and complicated offence, with which Nathan had charged him, and which was the ostensible cause of those denunciations of Divine displeasure, which Nathan was commissioned to communicate to him. And it is still, I believe, often the case, in the experience of penitents, that some grosser act of disobedience to the law of God is first employed by the Spirit of grace in bring-

ing conviction on the mind, in alarming the before torpid conscience, and in leading the soul to a knowledge of the fountain of evil in the natural corruption of human nature. With this view St. Peter, in his first sermon, charged his hearers with the crucifixion of the Son of God, in consequence of which "they were pricked in their hearts;" compunction was produced, and they cried out, "Men and brethren what shall we do?"¹ Thus our Lord charged the murderous Saul of Tarsus with persecution of Himself in His disciples: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"² And this sin seems to have been (to use the phrase which occurs in the last verse which we considered) "ever before" the Apostle's mind. It will be recollected that he refers to it again and again.³ He singled it out as the grand evidence of the natural malignity of his heart. Though pardoned, accepted, renewed, and joyful in the salvation of his Lord and Saviour, he carried to the block of martyrdom the remembrance of this sin. Thus a physician acts with respect to his patient. The disease lies deeply rooted in the constitution. He cannot have ocular demonstration that this is the case. But he finds one or more decisive symptoms which indicate the nature of the malady, and the danger to which it exposes its subject. On this evidence he proceeds to act, applying his remedy

¹ Acts ii. 36, 37. ² Acts ix. 4, 5. ³ 1 Tim. i. 13.

to the painful symptoms by adapting it to the primary disease from which they originate. David was thus instructed by his heavenly physician. The awful symptoms of inward depravity which had appeared, were made the means of guiding him to their cause, as we learn from the following verse—"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Though the symptoms of the spiritual disease cannot be forgotten by one who is under the process of a cure, because those afflictive symptoms, in a greater or less degree of malignity, must continue till the disease itself is eradicated; yet the patient is taught, after the disease itself has been discovered to him, to pay his primary attention to it, and to apply the sovereign remedy to that which is the cause of all the external effects which daily grieve his soul. And herein is a marked distinction between the real and the supposititious penitent. The latter may feel the effects of "sin which dwelleth in him;" but the former discerns their cause; and, like St. Paul in the latter part of the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, he acknowledges and bewails the corruption of his heart. The supposititious penitent may be aware that a change of conduct is necessary; but the contrite sinner, who is taught of God, feels the necessity of a renewal in the spirit of his mind, in order to any radical and lasting reformation.

Objections have sometimes been raised against the language which the contrite soul has been known to adopt, in calling himself, after the example of St. Paul, "the chief of sinners." It is true that God only can judge of the comparative degrees of guilt which His creatures have contracted, because He only accurately knows what have been the aggravations of sin, or its alleviations, as connected with constitutional tendencies, advantages of situation, temptations, and a thousand other considerations. It is also true, that there are few, if any persons in the church of God, who may not find in the annals of history, or perhaps within their own knowledge, those who have committed more aggravated outward enormities than themselves. But I verily believe that the truly penitent sinner is sincere in expressing his conviction, that no human heart has been more corrupt than his own. Taking, as he is taught to do, a minute survey of his own character in contrast with the spirituality of the Divine law ; taking into the account all his outward advantages, and the mercy which has been vouchsafed to him ; feeling bitterly how he has slighted the word, the ordinances, and the grace of God ; how he has resisted the motions of His spirit ; and, as it were, trampled on the blood of Christ ;—he is ready to subscribe to the Apostle's words, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ

Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief." The hearts of others he cannot inspect; but he has looked attentively into his own: the sight has completely sickened him, and he has turned from it with disgust, while, with the patriarch Job, he has exclaimed, "I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." He has looked again and again, and, as often as the investigation has been renewed, he has bemoaned himself with St. Paul, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And his conclusion at length has been, that he is insulated from others by a flood of peculiar sin and guilt. Such being the experience of a penitent sinner, (though I acknowledge that the avowal of being "the chief of sinners" may be too often a profession of a false humility; or rather may be the effect of disguised pride of heart, and be made for the purpose of eliciting from the hearer admiration of self-abasement which has never been felt;) yet I believe that the conviction thus avowed may be, and often is, the real conviction of the soul of a true penitent, and therefore I would by no means condemn the declaration, unless indifference in the utterance, or contradiction in the general tenour of the life, falsified the pretension to a repentant state of heart.

There is another peculiar trait of genuine penitence in David's acknowledgment, viz. the man-

ner in which he eyes God—"Against THEE have I sinned." "The sorrow of the world" chiefly, if not wholly, regards the sins which it regrets in their relation to men, as offences against social order,—injuries, in some shape or other, to our fellow creatures. Hence it confines the duty of self-examination to the second table of the law; and, even in that, it contemplates only the external breach, or the actual sin. "Thou shalt *love* thy neighbour as thyself" forms no part of its rule of self-condemnation. Persons of this class forget that the great transgression, which brought death into the world, and subjected all mankind to eternal condemnation, was the transgression of a positive command, and not of a moral precept. There is no prohibition of eating the fruit of a tree in either of the six precepts of the second table. But it was rebellion against the authority of God. It was a denial of His veracity. It was a preference of something to his favour. David had been better taught. He regarded his sin chiefly in its relation to God. "Against THEE I have sinned:" and if my sin had not been injurious to social order, if not one of my fellow creatures had suffered, or been exposed to suffering by it; had there been no precept in the second table of Thy law which forbad and condemned it; my rebellion against THY will, my ingratitude to THEE, my God; and the dishonour brought on Thy name,

would have deserved eternal condemnation.” The prodigal, as well as David, had sinned against others, against his companions in licentiousness and folly, and all to whom his example might prove contagious. But when he comes to his senses, every other consideration is merged in this,—“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son.”

The actual sins of the children of God, among whom David had been numbered before his fall, are, in a peculiar sense, sins against God, and are felt as such by the restored backslider. They have been committed in opposition to light and conviction, to past mercy received, and experience of Divine favour. They are a rejection of God. They are, to a certain extent, a renewed crucifixion of the Son of God, and a doing despite to the Spirit of grace. “Lord,” will every penitent cry, under the anguish arising from his own propensities to sin, “Lord, keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me : then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression”¹ of apostatizing from Thee, my God. David felt a necessity for the use of such a prayer; and so must every one, who, like him is acquainted with the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of his own heart.²

¹ Psalm xix. 13.

² Jer. xvii. 9.

The wilful commission of sin is practical Atheism: it supposes that there is no God who will punish it; or, at least, that He may not notice it; or that he may falsify His word by omitting to fulfil the positive denunciations of His righteous law. It denies His omnipotence, His omniscience, His veracity, or His holiness. And to strip him of His essential perfections, is doing all that a creature can do to deprive Him of being. For God and His perfections are one: They are inseparable.¹

The attempts at deception practised by the brethren of Joseph, in order to hide their sin from the knowledge of their father,—by Achan in burying his stolen goods,—by Gehazi, for the purpose of concealing from his master the bribery and corruption of which he had been guilty,—by David in plotting the death of the injured Uriah, and in the artful nature of that plot,—by Ananias in lying to the Holy Ghost, (and a thousand other instances might be produced, of which probably, the reader's recollection will furnish a specimen); these attempts show the folly of sin, and the state of blindness and degradation to which it reduces the wilful transgressor. Can the all-seeing God be deceived? or, will He not, sooner or later, “bring to light the hidden works of darkness,” if not before, yet in that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed?

¹ Ipse est nomen ejus; et nomen ejus est Ipse.

But do we not also endeavour to hide, and that often successfully, our sins even from ourselves by palliation and excuse, till the Spirit of God awakens the conscience as He did that of David. Thus Saul excused his breach of a positive explicit command, by a pretence of piety as influencing him to the act of preserving the cattle of Amalek. And thus Adam cast the blame of eating the prohibited fruit on the allurements of Eve, and Eve on the temptation of the Serpent. And, in like manner, their fallen children discover something which they think may afford them an apology for their transgressions of the law of God. But, when the Spirit of God puts forth His mighty influence, the refuge of lies is swept away ; sin is discovered in its native deformity and just desert ; and the soul has nothing left but to make its appeal to the revealed mercy of its offended God.

There were other peculiar aggravations in the sin of David, which account for the mode of confession he adopted. “ Against Thee have I sinned ; ” ‘ I, Thy servant, Thy prophet,—the covenanted progenitor of Thy promised Messiah—I have wounded Thee in Thy dearest interest—I have done all I could to shake the credit of Thy word, to vacate Thy promises, on which the salvation of the world and Thine own glory are suspended.’ And are there not somewhat similar aggravations in the sins of God’s professing people now,—of

those who have been admitted into His Church by the Divinely instituted rite of baptism, who bear the Christian name, and avow themselves thereby to be true worshippers of God? Are not their sins wounds inflicted on His cause, the cause of Godliness? Do they not give just occasion for the question attributed to the heathen of old, “Where is now their God?” Do they not encourage the infidel in his blasphemies against religion?—and do they not cast a stumbling block in the way of the weak disciple, and discourage him in his progress? Let us tremble, lest, through our sin and folly, “the weak brother should perish, for whom Christ died.” It is indeed a striking proof of the Divine origin and character of Christianity, that it continues to exist in the world, notwithstanding the suicidal acts of those who are, or who profess to be, members of its community. While popery disfigures its lovely features by the grossest superstition, and a corrupted Protestantism throws over them the mask of latitudinarian indistinctness;—while heresy mutilates them, so as to leave nothing that can mark their real character and object, and a vicious conformity to the present evil world paralyzes their power,—the existence of any persons who have received the truth in the love of it, and who adorn its doctrine, can be attributed to nothing else but the Divinity of the

truth as it is in Jesus, and the demonstration of the Spirit accompanying its ministration.

But let us advert again to the exclusive adverb which the penitent Psalmist has used:—"Against Thee *only* have I sinned." Did he mean to assert that he had not sinned against his neighbour as well as against God? That he had not injured Uriah in his dearest interests, his wife, and his own person? That he had not injured Bathsheba, by inducing her to violate her matrimonial vow, and by destroying her character in the world, her domestic happiness, and her husband? That he had not sinned against the child, born of the adulterous connexion, and prematurely smitten of God?—Against all who fell with Uriah in the hopeless contest before the walls of Rabbah?—Against the whole congregation of the children of Israel, surrounding heathen nations, and all future generations?—That he would cause the enemies of the Lord in all ages to blaspheme?—The Psalmist did not mean to deny either of these charges, and probably conscience brought the whole indictment home with irresistible evidence. But his mind was engrossed with thoughts of God: the offence given to Him, and the dishonour done to Him, to His name and cause, swallowed up all other considerations while he was uttering his confession before the mercy-seat.

"Sin is the transgression of the law" of God.

This is its proper definition, and it is this which creates its criminality. "Where no law is, there is no transgression." In this view, all voluntary actual sin is on a level; it is "a transgression of the law" of God. We mean not to deny that there are gradations of guilt, and that there will be hereafter gradations of punishment; but we mean to say, that sin derives its malignity, chiefly from the authority and character of God, who has prohibited and condemned it, and not from the injury it does to a fellow-creature. It is this that a true penitent, chiefly regards in his contrition and confession. "Against *Thee only* have I sinned." Sin, voluntary actual sin, committed by a professor of religion, is against the Father of mercies, against the atoning Saviour, against the regenerating and sanctifying Spirit of grace. Let no one comfort himself with the self-righteous plea that he is free from the sins of David, adultery and murder; but let him bear in mind St. John's definition of sin, that it "is the transgression of the law;" and the corresponding declaration of the same Apostle, that "all unrighteousness is sin;" and that in both these assertions the terms which are employed denote a want of conformity to the law of God, and relate primarily to the first table of that law. Let him also recollect the assertion of another Apostle, that "the wages," the just award, "of sin is death," even that death which is opposed

to the “eternal life” of the following clause ; and which is declared to be the free “gift of God” to those, who, by sin, have forfeited all claim to its enjoyment.

We proceed to consider—

2. DAVID’S JUSTIFICATION OF THE CHARACTER AND DISPENSATIONS OF GOD. He adds—“*That thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.*”

The particle which connects the two clauses of our text, as it is here used, is not to be understood in a *casual*, but in a *consequential* sense. It does not mean *to the end* “that thou mightest be justified ;” but *so that* “Thou shalt be justified when Thou speakest,” &c. It denotes the event which would follow from the confession he had made,—the effect on his own mind, and which must also be produced in the minds of all who duly considered the case.

This clause of our text is produced by St. Paul,¹ for the purpose of showing that, though God should reject the Jews for their infidelity, they would have no reason to complain of His severity, or to charge Him with injustice or unfaithfulness on that account ; they having forfeited their right to the seed of Abraham, the father of the faithful, by their infidelity, and the Gentiles, by imitating his faith, being now become

¹ Romans iii. 3, 4.

his children. The appropriation of these words to the case of the Jews affords a sanction to Bishop Horsley's view of the Psalm, as being prophetically intended to express the feelings of the contrite Jews on their conversion to God and His Christ; but it does not, as I conceive, preclude an admission, that it was written by David for his own use, as a formulary of confession in regard to his personal offences. Such double references must be recognized in many of the quotations from the Old Testament which are found in the New.

We shall endeavour to point out the meaning and connexion of the clause, as it related, personally, to the royal penitent,—and as it relates to all who are partakers of his spirit.

We learn from the history of the Prophet Nathan's interview with David, recorded 2 Sam. xii. that after Nathan had made known to the criminal the pardon of his sin in the name of the Lord, he proceeded to denounce, on the same authority, those temporal judgments with which God would visit the offences which had been committed. The prophet assured him that the child of the adulterous intercourse should die, that his son should rebel against him, that his own wives should be abused as he had abused the wife of Uriah, and that the sword should never depart from his house. How these threatenings were accomplished, the subsequent history plainly

shows. The soul of the penitent was “saved, yet so as by fire.” God will have the universe of His rational creatures, whether in heaven, earth, or hell, to know that it is “an evil thing and bitter” to sin against Him.¹ It is necessary that God should be “justified when He speaks, and clear when He judges.” The ejection from Paradise; the whole ceremonial ritual, and particularly the perpetual fire of the brazen altar; the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels; the punishment, temporal, and eternal, of the impenitent; the pungent sorrows of the penitent; the afflictions of His people; the death of the body; and above all, the sufferings of Christ, His agony and bloody sweat, His cross and passion,—will demonstrate to all who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, that “our God is a consuming fire;” and that “with Him iniquity cannot dwell.” These considerations unite in testifying God’s hatred of sin, and in clearing the Divine character from any imputation of connivance at it in the display of His boundless grace in Christ Jesus our Lord. In addition therefore to the catalogue of his names and attributes which were announced to Moses, it is declared that “He will by no means clear the guilty:”²

¹ Jeremiah ii. 19.

² Exodus xxxiv. 7. The same Hebrew word is used in Jeremiah xlv. 28, and is rendered according to the marginal reading, “I will not utterly cut thee off.”

guilt must be removed, or the sinner must perish. In His plan of saving sinners, He reveals Himself as the **HOLY ONE**

X “Who, rather than His justice should be stain’d,
Hath stained the Cross.”

The drift, then, of the Psalmist’s declaration was this, that he fully justified God in the denunciations of His wrath, and the afflictions of His hand. He could not object to those severe and long-continued chastisements with which God threatened to visit his transgressions. He acknowledges that, if the sentence of the judicial law of Sinai on such sins as his had been, (for which no typical sacrifice was provided) were to be carried into execution, God would be therein holy and just; and that, if the still more tremendous curse of the moral law in eternal death were fulfilled, he should have no reason to complain. “Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight; so that Thou shalt be justified when Thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest.”

But this vindication of the character of God in the threatenings of His word, and the inflictions of His displeasure against sin, whether in the chastisements of His people or in the destruction of His enemies,—is connected essentially with all genuine repentance. He is not a penitent who does not thus justify God. And in this feature

of a contrite spirit may be found another criterion to mark the difference between “ Godly sorrow,” and “ the sorrow of the world which worketh death,”—between mere remorse and true humiliation,—between the spirit of the devils in their convictions and horrors, and the self-aborrent spirit of a child of God. The consent to the law, as “ holy, just, and good,” which St. Paul speaks of as wrought in his heart, is an invariable effect of that grace which is necessary to prepare the soul for a reception of the great and only atonement for sin. When the offerer under the Levitical law laid his hands on the head of the victim to be sacrificed, the act implied an acknowledgment that his own life was forfeited, and prayer that the life of his victim might be accepted as the substitute for his own. Faith in the Lord Jesus, the antitypical sacrifice, implies the same acknowledgment. Indeed without a conviction that “ the wages of sin,” its just award, “ is death,” the necessity for the great sacrifice cannot be felt, nor can thankfulness for its provision be produced. This conviction enters into all the emotions of a regenerate soul. But does it exist?—Is it habitual and prevalent in my own soul? None who bear the Christian name will hesitate to confess, in general terms, that the forfeiture of Paradise, the universal deluge, and the successive judgments which were inflicted on the Israelites, were acts of Divine Justice : none

who avow themselves Christians will deny the righteousness of the decision, that “without shedding of blood” there can be “no remission” of sin: none who admit the Bible to contain the word of God, can dispute the necessity of the atonement made upon the cross. But do I feel in my heart what I acknowledge with my lips, that *my* sin, original and actual, “deserveth God’s wrath and damnation?” Am I conscious “that every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God,” or, “subject to the judgment of God?”¹

This conviction of the heart, this acquiescence in the righteousness of God,—cannot be the result of any reasoning on the awful subject. Education and instruction cannot produce it. The lips may utter the confession, but the heart will revolt at a personal application of this truth till the Spirit of God has, by means of His word, made known the holiness of the Divine nature, the evil of sin in its contrariety to that holiness, and the righteousness of God as it has been displayed in the atoning sacrifice of His only begotten Son. There is a reaction between repentance and faith. Repentance is a conviction of the necessity of the atonement to a recovery of the favour of God; and faith, while it embraces that atonement, increases conviction of the guilt

¹ Rom. iii. 19. *Marginal Reading.*

and evil of sin. These effects of the grace of the regenerating Spirit, cannot therefore be dis-united ; and their natural co-operation must correspond both in their commencement and degree. It is as our eyes, those of the mind, see, like those of Isaiah, the Lord of Hosts in those attributes which are inseparable from His nature, that we are constrained with that prophet to exclaim,—“Unclean, unclean.” It is not enough that we hear of Him by the hearing of the ear ; our eye must see Him, we must have an experimental acquaintance with Him, before we can “abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes,” as the Patriarch Job did. We must be taught as St. Paul was, before we can “know that the judgment of God is according to truth, and that His judgment is “righteous judgment.”¹

This latter clause of our text, in which David justifies the dispensations of God towards him, may lead us to remark, that there is, oftentimes a relative connexion discernible between the sins of God’s people and the chastisements they experience—a connexion of congruity. The kind of chastisement corresponds with the special sins which make it necessary. We have remarked this congruity in the case of David. St. Paul’s thorn in the flesh was, doubtless, a proper check to pride of heart. The painful questions, and

¹ Rom. ii. 2, 5.

apparent doubts of sincerity, expressed to Peter by his Lord, were unquestionable reproofs of that disciple's thrice repeated denial of his Master. The mode of conviction employed in the cure of the incredulity of Thomas was painfully felt by him as a tender reproach of the unbelief he had so unreasonably cherished. Other instances might be produced; but, perhaps, we may discover some exemplification of the remark in our own experience. The remedy is thus adapted to the disease, and preserves the character of that disease from being forgotten, so that the recovered patient is constrained to say, with increased emphasis, "My sin is ever before me." The remark may also be extended to the sins of the impenitent and the temporal judgments which follow them. By the leprosy of Naaman which clave to Gehazi, he was reminded of his sinful cupidity, and of his treachery to his master. What effect this memento (a memento for life,) produced on him or on his posterity, we know not. The sin of crucifying the Son of God was followed by the crucifixion of such numbers of His murderers and their children, that the trees of the forest round Jerusalem failed to supply crosses for any further suspensions. This connexion is sometimes that of cause and effect, as in the ruin of the constitution, and the production of disease, by a course of excess. In other instances, the hand of a just God is still more manifest by the agency employed.

We may remark further, that the severest chastisements are not inconsistent with pardoning mercy ; on the contrary, when they produce their intended effect in humiliation of the heart, they are the best evidence of interest in that mercy. “ Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not ? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.”¹ “ Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees.”² Yet how often does the afflicted believer infer, from the severity or long continuance of his affliction, a conclusion directly opposite to that which the Scriptures warrant ? Let him learn to say, “ This was my infirmity.”

God has combined, both in the scheme of redemption and in the operations of His grace, His own manifestative glory with the salvation of His people. This is apparent in the visitations of His rod, as well as in the whispers of His love. Those invitations, while they humble and purify the soul, vindicate God, by discovering His hatred of Sin, and the necessity of its destruction in all who shall dwell with Him. “ Let us continue in sin that grace may abound,” is a suggestion

¹ Heb. xii. 6—8.

² Verse 12.

of the devil, which can find no encouragement in a regenerate and penitent sinner.

We remark further, that the real penitent is brought, gradually perhaps, but at length effectually, to acquiesce in the necessity, wisdom, and goodness of the afflictive dispensations of Divine love. “It is of the Lord’s mercy that I am not consumed; it is because his compassions fail not.”¹ I have deserved His wrath and damnation; but I am out of hell, and have hope of heaven. By these holy reasonings, murmuring and fretfulness are restrained. All I feel is less than my sin has merited; and I am assured that all has a tendency to promote the glory of God and my eternal benefit. “These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us,” by their sanctifying effects on the soul, “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look,” as our scope and aim, “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”²

Yet one remark more: How glaring is the folly of disputing the sovereignty of Divine grace. The penal sufferings of Christ, and the parental chastisements of His redeemed, concur to prove that “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth

¹ Lam. iii. 22.

² 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

mercy.”¹ While these affecting facts agree in showing the damning nature of sin, they demonstrate, at the same time, that salvation is altogether of grace, in its rise, progress, and accomplishment.

In the great day of judgment the vindication of the Divine character will be complete, both in the salvation of the redeemed and the everlasting destruction of impenitent sinners. Angels and glorified saints, and even devils and lost souls, will be constrained to join in the acknowledgement, “ Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and true are thy judgments.”¹ May we now learn the important lesson, taught by our text, to the glory of God and the salvation of our own souls ! Amen and Amen.

¹ Rom. ix. 16.

² Revelation xvi. 7 ; xix. 2.

PSALM LI. 5.

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

IN the words of our text, the author of this penitential formulary traces up the awful effects which had been manifested in the enormities of his conduct, to their cause in the natural corruption of his heart. Such a mental process is a necessary consequence of Divine teaching. The stream which issues from the natural heart is invariably foul. That which makes it so may not be at once discovered ; but an inquiry is at length instituted on the subject. The stream is examined up to its source ; and the result is that which is stated in the text : “ Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

The penitent Psalmist had before hinted at the cause of his flagrant transgressions. In this verse he explains himself more fully on the awful subject. He accounts for his abominable conduct. It might appear an unaccountable phenomenon, that a rational and responsible creature should have perpetrated such crimes

as those he had confessed, against God, his own soul, and his fellow creatures. This phenomenon he unfolds : “ Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” The stream corresponds in pollution with the fountain whence it proceeded.

But it must be carefully observed, that this explanation is not adduced for the purpose of extenuating guilt, but of promoting further humiliation before God. It is addressed to God. and not to man. Its object was the abasement of that heart, to which he traces up his sins. His sins had not originated in any accidental cause ; but were the native fruits of a degenerate soil. This conclusion, to which his mind was brought, tended to deepen self-abasement, and to exalt the grace of God in the pardon of sin and the renewal of the heart.

Let us then consider—

1. DAVID’S BRIEF BUT COMPREHENSIVE MEMOIR OF HIMSELF : and,

2. HIS CALL OF ATTENTION TO THAT MEMOIR.

1. DAVID’S MEMOIR OF HIMSELF.

This divides itself into two parts—the state in which he was born, and—that in which he was conceived in the womb of his mother. In these few words he carries up his personal history as far as it could be carried, and implies more than

he expresses ; for it was impossible to go so far without going further. The being conceived in sin obviously implies a process which must lead to the corruption of human nature in its fountain, the first covenant-head, the fallen progenitor of the degraded family of man.

The state in which he was shapen, or rather born, brought forth into the world, was a state of iniquity or perversion from that which is “holy, just, and good,” in all the faculties both of soul and body. Alienation from God is that which is here described, as we observed when this same word occurred in the second verse of the Psalm. The Apostle’s description of man, when he speaks of him as “alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in him,” may be considered as a paraphrase on the word here employed by the Psalmist. This branch of his memoir refers, it will be observed, to a period of his personal history which preceded the first dawn of reason, and the possibility of actual sin.

But he ascends higher still, even to the state in which he was conceived in the womb of his mother ; thereby intimating plainly that he considered the corruption of his nature to have been derived through the same channel as his very existence, and to have been coeval with that existence.

This fundamental article of scriptural doctrine

has been disputed in our own day, as it has been in all ages. Pelagianism did not originate with Pelagius, nor did it die with him. The doctrine of original sin is one against which the pride of man revolts,—to which the human mind cannot submit, until it has been taught of God, and humbled in the dust before Him. To be considered not only as a sinner, a rebel convict by the law of God; but to have the rebellion and its consequent outlawry traced up through the race of man from generation to generation, the very blood tainted, all claim vacated, the whole family disqualified for service or reward, and the penalty of high treason, incurred by a progenitor, fixed on ourselves, and descending to our latest posterity,—this is too much for the traitor to admit, till a court of conscience, instituted in his own bosom, under the influence of the Omniscient Judge, has brought him in guilty, and pronounced the sentence of the law upon him. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that (or, *in whom*¹) all have sinned.”

The connexion of this doctrine with the whole system of Christianity, and the objections which are raised against it, render its confirmation highly important. It is a fundamental doctrine. Thereon the doctrine of redemption by the Son of God, ˘

¹ Romans v. 12. *Marginal Reading.*

and that of regeneration by His Holy Spirit, are built. Very imperfect must their views of the beautiful superstructure of grace be, who reject the foundation on which it stands. Indeed, if the foundation be removed, the superstructure must fall to the ground. If human guilt and corruption be only accidental and occasional; if they be not radical in their character, and universal in their effects, the conviction of a necessity for the interference of a Divine Redeemer and a Divine Regenerator, must be slight and inefficient. In this case, little importance will be attached to the assertion of St. Peter, that “there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved;”¹ and as little will be attached to the solemn declaration of our Lord Himself, that, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”²

It is a maxim found in Scripture, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word is established. If the witnesses are credible and clear in their testimony, no question ought to be raised about the truth of that which is attested by a competent number. We shall produce three unexceptionable witnesses in support of the doctrine, or rather of the fact, brought before us in the text: these are **THE BIBLE**, **REASON**, and **THE CHURCH** to which we belong.

¹ Acts iv. 12.

² John iii. 3.

We begin with the Bible, the revelation of God on the subject. This is the supreme authority, the standard to which every other claimant on our belief must be brought. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."¹ A single declaration from the word of God, if it be clear and decisive, is a sufficient warrant for faith—a sufficient answer to all objection. If we had no sanction from the reason of the case, nor from the doctrine of a fallible church, the Scriptures would decide all controversy on the momentous subject.

There are two points comprehended in the orthodox doctrine of original sin, which we shall establish by Scriptural proof. The first is the imputation of the primary transgression of Adam to all his posterity, and the other is the communication of moral corruption in the same extent. These two effects of the fall are so connected, that a separation between them is impossible. The communication of depravity, or the infection of our nature, implies guilt as its meritorious cause; and if guilt be the consequence of a federal connexion between the covenant-head and all the members of his body, that guilt cannot be apart from moral corruption. For as Aaron was in the loins of Abraham, when Melchizedec met

¹ Isaiah viii. 20.

the latter (as St. Paul asserted¹ when speaking of another subject); so the whole race of mankind, in all their generations, were in the loins of their father Adam, when he brake the covenant into which God had entered with him. God might have destroyed His creature and have created another; but as God in His wisdom saw fit to continue the race of Adam, no way appears of avoiding the consequence which has resulted from our natural traduction out of his loins. A tree must bear fruit corresponding with its own nature. “Men do not gather grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles.” “A fountain cannot send forth both sweet water and bitter.” Every thing is found to agree in character with the source whence it is derived.

Now the doctrine of the imputation of the great transgression to all the descendants of Adam is, again and again, asserted or implied by St. Paul’s discourse in the latter part of the fifth chapter of the Epistle which he wrote to the converted Romans. There we find a parallel drawn between the first and second Adam as separate covenant-heads, from which parallel the doctrine might have been inferred, if no direct declaration of it had been made. But we are not left to make the inference for ourselves; the Apostle has made it for us. “Wherefore as by one man

¹ Hebrews vii. 10.

sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that (or, *margin*, in whom) all have sinned. For until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of Him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift; for if, through the offence of one, many be dead; much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence (or, *margin*, by one offence) death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one (or, *margin*, by one offence) judgment came upon all men to condemnation: even so by the righteousness of One (or, *margin*, by one righteousness), the free gift came upon all men to justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners: so by the obedience of One, (or one obedience) shall many be made righteous."

It seems impossible to place the awful truth which we are maintaining, in a clearer light than

that in which the Apostle has placed it, or to assert it in more direct terms. But as I am aware that the doctrine has been and is denied, or reduced to a mere shadow of that which the Apostle, and, with him, our church maintains ; I shall support that view of it which I esteem orthodox, by quoting the words of two eminent prelates of the Church of England, neither of whom can be charged with extravagance in any of their theological opinions. These learned authors are the late Bishop of Lincoln in his ‘ Elements of Christian Theology,’ and Bishop Burnet as quoted by him. In commenting on the ninth article of our Church, Bishop Tomline, after quoting the following words from the article, ‘ *And therefore, in every person born into the world, it (original sin) deserveth God’s wrath and damnation,*’ adds, ‘ These words imply, that every person who is born into the world, exclusive of the sins which he himself commits, or even if he does not live to commit sin, is, on account of the disobedience and guilt of Adam, subject to the wrath and punishment of God ; and we have seen the same thing intimated in the second article, where it is said, that Christ suffered ‘ as a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men.’ This is the doctrine of St. Augustine and his followers, whose opinions upon this subject are thus stated and supported by Bishop Burnet : ‘ They believe that a cove-

nant was made with all mankind in Adam as their first parent ; that he was a person constituted by God to represent them all ; and that the covenant was made with him, so that, if he had obeyed, all his posterity should have been happy through his obedience ; but, by his disobedience, they were all to be esteemed to have sinned in him, his act being imputed and transferred to them all.’ This opinion seems to have great foundation in that large discourse of St. Paul’s, where, in the fifth of the Romans, he compares the blessings we receive by the death of Christ with the guilt and misery that were brought upon us by the sin of Adam. Now it is confessed that by Christ we have both an imputation or communication of the merits of His death, and likewise a purity and holiness of nature conveyed to us by His doctrine and Spirit. In opposition then to this, if the comparison is to be closely pursued, there must be an imputation of sin, as well as a corruption of nature, transferred to us from Adam. This is the more considerable as to the point of imputation, because the chief design of St. Paul’s discourse seems to be levelled at that, since it is begun upon the head of reconciliation and atonement ; upon which it follows, that “ as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that (or, as others render it, in whom) all have sinned.” Now they think it is all one to their point, whether it

be rendered 'for that,' or 'in whom;' for though the latter words seem to deliver their opinion more precisely, yet it being affirmed that, according to the other rendering, all who die have sinned, and it being certain that many infants die who have never actually sinned, these must have sinned in Adam; they could sin no other way. It is afterwards said by St. Paul, that "by the offence of one many were dead;" that "the judgment was by one to condemnation;" that "by one man's offence death reigned by one;" that "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation;" and that "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners." As these words are positive and of great importance in themselves, so all this is much the stronger by the opposition in which every one of them is put to the effects of Christ's death, particularly to our justification through Him, in which there is an imputation of the merits and effects of His death that are thereby transferred to us; so that the whole effect of this discourse (of St. Paul) is taken away, if the imputation of Adam's sin is denied. And this explanation does certainly quadrate more entirely with the article, as it is known that this was the tenet of those who prepared the articles, it having been the generally received opinion from St. Austin's days downward.'

The second point comprehended in the doctrine

of original sin, the universally derived corruption of human nature, is still more frequently spoken of in Divine Revelation. Indeed it is implied or asserted throughout the volume, and thereon all its other doctrines are built. It is found almost at the commencement of the sacred record, and terminates only with its close. It is to be inferred from Abel's animal sacrifice, and is evidenced in the conduct of Cain. Before the flood the testimony of Jehovah is full and decisive on the subject. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth:" this was the fruit with which the tree was loaded. Then follows an account of the root which produced it: "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." In the margin the translators have truly added, "The Hebrew word signifieth not only *the imagination* but also *the purposes and desires*." What words could have been used more expressive of the universality and totality of human corruption? The desires and purposes, the earliest symptoms of thought, are evil, "*only* evil," and that "*continually*," or without intermission. The same awful testimony is again borne by the same authority after the flood. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." The Divine institution of the rite of circumcision most clearly implies the doctrine of original sin. It was a declaration by Him who enjoined it, and a

confession made by all who submitted to it, on which our text is the best comment. "Behold, I was born in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me." Such is, in part, the evidence afforded by the first book of Scripture; and what is the mysterious subject of the last but a prophetic history of the human heart, in its abuse of that wonderful provision which God has made for its conversion and salvation?

To collect the evidence which the Bible affords would occupy more time than the present opportunity will allow for the purpose. We must therefore be content with referring to a few passages, of which our own hearts will afford the best explanation. The text itself is quite conclusive: for it cannot be supposed that David, in his conception and birth, differed from other men, or that subsequent generations have been improved in their *nature*. Ten thousand cions in succession must partake of the same character with the native stock from which they all originally sprang. Indeed the confessions of St. Paul at a subsequent period, recorded in the latter part of the 7th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, correspond precisely with those of the Old Testament Saint recorded in our text. "In me, that is, in my flesh," as contradistinguished from his new nature derived from the Spirit of God, "dwelleth *no* good thing."

When our Lord traces up the enormities which

often disgrace the conduct of mankind to the heart as their source¹—when He makes a regeneration necessary to an entrance into the kingdom of heaven²—when He charges the professing people of God with being of their father the devil³—when He instituted the rite of Baptism, and made it the door of admission to His church,—He attests the affecting truth we are maintaining. Indeed, the necessity of His incarnation, sufferings, and death, and of the consequent agency of His Holy Spirit, is itself equivalent to a thousand arguments to prove that man is radically corrupt. To what extent that corruption goes, we shall presently state in the language of our third witness, as soon as we have briefly considered that of the second.

REASON, when unclouded by that pride of heart which is itself the strongest and a universally prevailing evidence of man's fallen state, concurs with Divine Revelation in the testimony it must bear. For the universal corruption of manners, in all ages and in all countries, civilized and uncivilized, can be accounted for only on the supposition of one universally influential and connatural cause of the melancholy phenomenon. "The carnal mind" has, without any exception, proved itself to be "enmity against God."⁴

¹ Matt. xv. 19.

² John iii. 3.

³ John viii. 44.

⁴ Rom. viii. 7.

“ Jews and Gentiles are all under sin ; as it is written—‘ There is none righteous, no not one there is none that understandeth ; there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not one.’ ”¹ What ! Is it true that no individual has ever existed among the myriads of the human race, whose heart has been right with God, not one who has walked with God in holy fellowship and obedience, with the exception of those who have been regenerated by His Spirit ? Surely, if this be so, reason must conclude that man is “ born in iniquity and conceived in sin.” The process of departure from the revelation graciously bestowed, described by St. Paul in Rom. i. 19, &c. as having taken place in the heathen world, and similar apostacies in the Jewish and Christian Church, all concur to demonstrate the tendency of the heart to ignorance, folly, and moral depravity. When a dam has been raised in the channel of corruption, how soon has the turbid and raging stream overflowed it, and washed it away !

It would be easy to produce confessions of heathen philosophers, before and about the time of our Lord’s advent, showing the conclusion to which reason and natural conscience had brought

¹ Romans iii. 9. 12.

them, with respect to the present state of human nature.¹ They acknowledge the consciousness they felt of their need of a Divine Teacher to guide them to the truth, and of something out of their own reach to make them happy ; and their ingenious fable of the transmigration of souls shows that they were sensible of the degraded state of human nature, though they were unable to account for its origination.

But without dwelling longer on the testimony of heathen philosophy on the subject, must not the actual state of things in this our world lead every reflecting mind, when it contemplates the scene presented to its notice, to the conclusion that man is “ born in iniquity and conceived in sin ?” Were a spectator from another sphere, uninformed of what has taken place in ours, and consequently unprejudiced in his judgment, to contemplate things as they are, the state of the elements and the face of material nature,—the condition of man as a suffering and dying creature, his wants, his agonies, his end ;—if he were to notice man’s restless and unsatisfied desires, his childish occupations, his manifest aversion to the author of all happiness, his eager pursuit of that which has for so long a succession of ages been proved to be no better than “ vanity and vexation of spirit ; ”—if he contemplated the

¹ See the author’s work on “ DIVINE INFLUENCE,” Discourse vi.

means which are found necessary for the preservation of property, and even of life itself, from being injured or taken away by man from man, and the laws which have been enacted for the punishment of anti-social offences ; the infidelity, theoretic or practical, in relation to the existence of a First Cause, or the perfections of His nature, and the rebellion against divine authority that so widely prevail ;—were he to consider the necessity of education to the formation of morals, and the frequent failure of the best education in producing even an external decency of conduct ; —would not a conclusion be forced upon the observant visitor of our terrestrial globe, that things cannot be in the same state in which they came from the hands of a wise and benevolent Creator ; that some moral convulsion, widely extensive, and powerfully operative, must have taken place : And if the doctrine of our text were announced to him, would he not find in the phenomena around him its complete confirmation ?

In appealing to the third witness whom I proposed to call, THE CHURCH, of which we are members, a small part only of the evidence can be produced. But the evidence which shall be produced is so decisive, that no comment can add to its effect. I shall therefore only transcribe a few extracts, beginning with the ninth article, which is entitled

‘OF ORIGINAL OR BIRTH SIN.’

‘Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the *fault* and *corruption* of the *nature* of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit, and therefore, in every person born into this world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh, called in the Greek *phronema sarkos*, which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh, is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.’

With the doctrine of the article corresponds that of the first exhortation in the Baptismal Service—‘Forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin,’ (our church applies universally what David has said of himself) ‘and that our Saviour Christ saith—none can enter into the kingdom of God except he be regenerate and born anew of water and the Holy Ghost; I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ,—that of His bounteous

mercy He will grant to this child that thing which by nature he cannot have ; that he may be baptised with water and the Holy Ghost, and received into Christ's holy church, and be made a lively member of the same.'

The baptism of infants is founded on the doctrine of original sin ; and to give up the practice is to weaken the evidence, or, at least to vacate the recognition, of the natural state of man, which recognition our Lord intended should be made by this ceremony. Infant Baptism is one of the three witnesses on earth, which attest the necessity and provision of atonement and of regenerating grace,¹—blessings which man 'by nature cannot have.' A minister baptising an infant, and the parent and sponsors bringing a child to the baptismal font, who, at the same time, deny the doctrine of 'Birth sin,' contradict their own practice, charge their church with absurdity, and the word of God with falsehood. And yet how often, may it be feared, is this Divine rite performed without any conviction of its true necessity and intention !

This discourse has been so swelled with quotations, that a few out of the multiplied passages which might be produced from the Homilies,

¹ The Antipædobaptist will do well to consider, whether he has not given up the *symbolic* evidence which our Lord has graciously appointed for the preservation of these doctrines in the world.

must suffice ; but these will be decisive and full, in showing what is the doctrine of the Church of England. ‘Of ourselves,’ says the Homily on the Misery of Man) ‘and by ourselves, we have no goodness, help, or salvation ; but, contrariwise, sin, damnation, and death everlasting ; into this miserable captivity we were cast, through the envy of the devil, by breaking of God’s commandments IN our first parent Adam.’ In the Homily for Whitsunday, we read—‘Man of his own nature, is fleshly and carnal, corrupt and naught, sinful and disobedient to God, without any spark of goodness in him, without any virtuous and godly motions, only given to evil thoughts and wicked deeds.’ Again, in the Sermon on the Nativity, it is said that by the fall of Adam ‘it came to pass, as before man was blessed, so now he was accursed ; as before he was loved, so now he was abhorred ; as before he was most beautiful and precious, so now he was most vile and wretched in the sight of his Lord and Maker : instead of the image of God, he was now become the image of the devil ; instead of the citizen of heaven, he was become the bond slave of hell ; having in himself no one part of his former purity and cleanness, but being altogether spotted and defiled : insomuch that now he seemed to be nothing else but a lump of sin, and therefore by the just judgment of God was condemned to everlasting death.’ And yet

once more—‘ This so great and miserable a plague fell not only on Adam, but also on his posterity and children for ever, so that the whole brood of Adam’s flesh should sustain the self-same fall and punishment, which their forefathers by his offence most justly had deserved.’ Then, after referring to the words of St Paul, in Rom. v. which we have already recited, the Homily proceeds to exclaim, ‘ O what a miserable and woful state was this, that the sin of one man should destroy and condemn all men, that nothing in all the world might be looked for but only pangs of death and pains of hell!’

I abstain from making any further quotations and only pause to observe on those I have made: how appropriate is the comment they afford on the petitions which we constantly use in our Litany — ‘ Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners,’ — ‘ From everlasting damnation, good Lord, deliver us.’ Happy is it, if we understand and feel the force of our own prayers.

This then, the universal and total corruption of the nature of man derived from Adam, is the source to which the enlightened penitent traces up the sins of his life. The experience of his own heart at once confirms and illustrates the doctrine which his BIBLE, his REASON, and his CHURCH, have taught him to believe. He has a corresponding “witness in himself.” He can verify all he has read and heard on the subject.

He cannot forget it, because the evidence is “continually before him,” and is daily increasing in force. This keeps him humble before God,—this increases his value of the great atonement for sin,—this gives energy to his prayer, “Cleanse Thou the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy holy name.” We proceed to consider briefly,

2. THE PSALMIST’S CALL OF ATTENTION TO THE MEMOIR OF HIMSELF, WHICH HE HAS RECORDED. “*BEHOLD, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*” It is as much as if he had said, ‘The fruits of a tree prove what the tree itself is—see what I am by the fruits I have produced in my conduct. Judge of my nature by its effects.’ The words are addressed to God who knoweth the heart, not to convey information, but to implore pitiful regard to the affecting statement.

The doctrine of our text, considered in its relation to all mankind, may well have this index prefixed to its enunciation. ‘*Behold, man is born in iniquity and conceived in sin.*’

The index is important, because the doctrine is denied, or misconceived, or slighted, and is too often ridiculed; for “fools make a mock at sin.” By persons, calling themselves Christians, sin is ascribed to an incidental cause, unconnected with natural corruption; and it is not uncommon

to hear even a flagrant transgressor described as having, notwithstanding the abominations of his conduct, *a good heart*. A want of early instruction, sudden temptation, or the effect of evil example, are resorted to as extenuations of a vicious practice. Hence fatal mistakes are made on other fundamental doctrines of revelation: for from hence originates the confusion of works with faith in the momentous doctrine of justification before God; and hence the vain supposition that man is able, with little or no aid from above, at least, without the new creating energy of the Divine Spirit, to prepare himself for heaven, and to qualify himself for its enjoyments.

“**BEHOLD**,” then, the importance of a thorough conviction that our state is a fallen state, a state of guilt, pollution, and helplessness. In this all vital religion commences; and it is essential to it in every stage of its progress. It is a vital principle, both in “repentance towards God, and in faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.” “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”

“**BEHOLD**” then the necessary connexion between this doctrine and the freeness of Divine mercy in the great work of redemption. There is no predisposing motive to be found in man, as leading to this exuberance of grace, but his utter misery. Every attempt to build the scheme of redemption

on qualifications of any kind to be looked for in its objects must be utterly vain, the effect of ignorance, pride and presumption, of impenitence, and unbelief. Grace is, as the very word imports, unconnected with merit or congruity, whether preceding or accompanying its reception. We are "Justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

"BEHOLD," further, the necessity of this redemption, redemption by the sacrifice of the Son of God. Judge of the deplorable character of your fallen state, by the remedy which Divine wisdom and love provided; and of the value of that remedy by the case which led to its provision. These considerations, like light and shade in a landscape, mutually illustrate each other. If man had not been desperately fallen, Christ the Son of God needed not to have died to save him; and if Christ "died to save sinners," sin must be in the sight of God, an evil of infinite magnitude.

"BEHOLD," also, the necessity of regeneration and sanctification by an omnipotent agency—of a "new creation," as the change wrought in conversion is scripturally described. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh: marvel not therefore" said our Lord to Nicodemus, and through him to all, "that I said unto you ye must be born again." "That which is born of the flesh," the state of man by nature, "is flesh," corruption still,

through whatever modification it may pass, by education, civilization, or religious association. There is such a thing (and it is not uncommon) as a religion of association, which is distinct from conversion to God. The change must be radical, a change of principles and affections, of our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, our desires and aversions. It is a superinduction of spirituality, where the carnal mind was before dominant. "To be carnally-minded is death; but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace."

Lastly, let the professed penitent look into the mirror which our text places before his eyes. Are *your* sensibilities on this subject those of the penitent Psalmist? Has the stream led *you* up to the fountain? Have the fruits led *you* to examine the root which bears them? The spirit of true penitence is inseparably connected with the doctrine of original sin.

PSALM LI. 6.

*Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts :
and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to
know wisdom.*

THESE words are connected with those which precede them ; and the connexion between them is marked by a repetition of the word, “ Behold.” This index claims particular attention for the considerations suggested by both verses. The connexion is one of opposition and contrast between the natural hereditary state of man, described in the 5th verse ; and that state of mind and heart which alone God can approve, and to which He must restore, and has promised to restore, His fallen creatures, in order to make them happy.

In order that this contrast may produce its due effect in exciting increased humiliation of heart, and increased fervency in prayer for pardon and renewing grace, let the Psalmist’s confession in the former verse be still born in mind : “ Behold, I was born in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” ‘ I have, naturally, nothing belonging to me that Thou, O God, canst approve,

nothing that is consonant with the spiritual requisitions of Thy law, or that answers to the ends for which I was created—Thy glory and my own happiness. On the contrary, my nature is “earthly, sensual, devilish.” Earthly and sensual in all its springs of action, which are under the influence of him “who worketh,” energetically and effectually, “in all the children of disobedience.” I feel myself degraded to a level with the worm of the dust, the beasts that perish; and even the spirit of evil himself. My bodily appetites and pursuits assimilate me to the former; and the tempers of my intellectual part bear too strong a resemblance of the latter for me to mistake their character or origin. But, “*Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part Thou wilt make me to know wisdom.*” Here is the blessed difference between fallen man and other degraded creatures, that he is capable of being restored to Thy favour and image, and that Thou hast promised to be his Restorer.’

The text will lead us to consider—

1. THE OBJECT OF DIVINE APPROBATION AND REQUISITION—“*Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.*”

2. THE OBJECT OF FAITH AND PRAYER IN THE HEART OF EVERY SINCERE PENITENT—“*In the hidden part Thou shalt,*” or Thou wilt, “*make me to know wisdom.*”

1. THE OBJECT OF DIVINE APPROBATION AND REQUISITION—" *Thou desirest* " &c.

" Truth " is a word of large and varied signification in the holy Scriptures. Its primary import is the converse of falsehood, in word or action, with respect to the intercourse of man with man, of God with man, or man with God. With a view to the fidelity of His promises, and the substantial nature of the blessings He bestows, God is called " the God Amen," or " the God of Truth ;" and our Lord calls Himself " the Amen, the faithful and true witness." Sometimes this important word, when the demonstrative article is prefixed to it, signifies the system of truth revealed in the Gospel, comprehending all the facts and doctrines which are contained in Divine Revelation, on the practical belief of which our salvation is suspended, and the rejection of which is the ground of eternal condemnation to all who possess an opportunity of knowing it. Sometimes " Truth " imports the reality of that happiness which true religion affords to the soul that cultivates it, in opposition to the vain expectations of idolaters, and the equally vain and delusive hopes of those who are characterized as " men of the world, who have their portion," such as it is, " in this life," and none beyond it. And, yet once more, the word " truth " is used to distinguish substance from shadow, the thing represented from that which

is its representative, the realities of the Gospel from their prefigurations in ancient types and symbols. "The law was given by Moses, but Grace and *Truth* came by Jesus Christ."

In the text, "Truth" means sincerity in opposition to hypocrisy—a conformity between the profession of the lips and the real state of the heart. It is the power of Godliness in opposition to its mere form.

Two questions naturally arise in connexion with Divine requisition and approval, with regard to the state of man. The first relates to the condition of a continuance in the enjoyment of the favour of God before the Fall; and the second inquiry to that which is required as necessary to the enjoyment of Divine favour as restored through our Lord Jesus Christ, since man has become a transgressor and has forfeited that favour.

The answer to the first of these questions will be found in our Lord's reply to the captious inquiry of the lawyer who asked him, "Master, which is the great commandment of the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." This is the inalienable right, and the unabandoned claim of Jehovah, the Maker

of heaven and earth. The positive law of Paradise, by the transgression of which man forfeited the favour of God and whatever stands connected with it, was a test of this "love," which "is the fulfilling of the law." This is the law of heaven, and earth and hell, which no circumstances, under which a rational creature can be brought, have any power to vacate. The claim remains in undiminished vigour, though fallen angels, and fallen men, have disabled themselves from complying with it. It is a claim which extends to the whole period of the creature's existence; and it reaches to all the powers of soul and body in their utmost energy of exertion. It admits of no interruption, no abatement of the duty required. The debtor of a farthing's amount, if such a thing could exist, and the debtor of ten thousand talents, are equally in a bankrupt state: both have forfeited their creation rights. Both are absolutely insolvent. The law says, "Pay me that thou owest"—"This do, and thou shalt live." But it adds, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." The curse is annexed to a failure, at any moment, or in any degree, of that which the law demands, not only in relation to overt acts, but to the inward affections of the soul. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the law has been changed with the change which has taken place in the state and character of man. The demand of the law is unchangeable, as is also its awful sanction. "The soul that sinneth," that misses the mark of perfection, "shall die." Hence arose the necessity of a mediatorial righteousness commensurate with the requisition of the law, for the justification of sinners in the sight of God,—that righteousness, or fulfilment of the law, which, in order to its being available to its required object, must be performed by a Divine Person, who is therefore called by Jeremiah, "Jehovah our righteousness." He came "not to destroy the law, to lower its demands, or to abolish its penalty, "but to fulfil" the former, and to bear the latter in His own person.

The doctrine of a remedial law, which some have substituted for the Gospel of Christ, is not a "doctrine according to Godliness," but the reverse: it is a doctrine according to ungodliness. It is blasphemy against the immutability, the holiness and justice of the Divine character. It vilifies His law, as being capable of relaxation from its just claims. It says to the fallen creature, God will be content with less than He originally demanded. It vacates the necessity of the atoning sacrifice and justifying righteousness of the Son of God, and also of the regenerating influence of His Holy Spirit. It weakens

the constraining power of the love of Christ, by lowering our obligations to it; and so far as it does this, it is antinomian in its tendency. It leaves man to determine for himself what degree of sincere obedience is necessary to justify a claim to eternal life, no criterion being laid down in Scripture; it strips repentance of its self-annihilating character, and deprives faith of its object, in the perfected work of Christ. It gives the lie to the declaration of the expiring Saviour when He cried "It is finished;" and it leaves to the sinner, in opposition to the express declaration of Scripture, that whereof he may glory before God. This scheme has proved to the Protestant Church, what superstition, in all its abhorrent forms, has proved to the Papal, an inlet to various evil. Like a torpedo, it has paralysed the doctrine of the Reformation, and produced that awful state of spiritual declension into which the church has long been falling.

But we return to the momentous inquiry, what it is that God requires and can approve in regard to man as fallen and redeemed? In what does He now delight? The 17th verse of this Psalm will furnish a reply to this second inquiry. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." In this persuasion the Psalmist is justified by the whole tenour of the word of God. For "thus saith the High and Lofty One, that

inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place ; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." And again—"To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." And yet once more, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." He requires and approves that disposition in the soul which suits the designs of His grace, and corresponds with the provision revealed in the Gospel for the salvation of man. As all that is required by the perfections and law of God is provided in the Surety, Jesus ; the recipient must be emptied of all supposed personal sufficiency and qualification, in order that room may be made for the admission of His grace, "who, of God, is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." If any thing of our own be left, the grace of Christ must be so far excluded and dishonoured. He must be "ALL IN ALL."

"Truth in the inward parts" is a conviction of our real state as it is made known to us by the Searcher of hearts in the pages of His word, and by the teaching of His Spirit in the heart. The former may produce the theory of truth in the judgment ; but the latter is necessary to produce a consciousness of "truth in the inward parts," the conscience and the affections. Many

possess the former who are strangers to the latter. They do not necessarily go together. Both are essential to constitute a state of Divine approval. "The poor in spirit," and they only, "shall see the kingdom of heaven."

While however we speak of inward sincerity as essential to an interest in Christ and His salvation, we must beware of counterfeits. The claim of sincerity is preferred by many who have no part nor lot in the inestimable blessing.

It is frequently preferred by persons who have no sense of religion, and whose very pretension to sincerity proves the enmity of their hearts to God and to all the doctrines of His Gospel. It is by no means uncommon to hear the bitterest opposers of evangelical truth, while endeavouring to criminate its professors with insincerity, saying of themselves,—'Well, at least I am no hypocrite.' This claim of sincerity is compatible with the utmost state of irreligion, with the habitual practice of open vice. Though ungodly to a proverb, the claim of honesty is thought sufficient to afford hope, at least, of doing well at the last. But "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people who forget God."

There is no reason to doubt that Saul of Tarsus was sincere in his pharisaical righteousness and his opposition to Christianity ; but previous to his conversion he was "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious,"—the enemy of God and man, as

he himself afterward acknowledged, though he thought, in his state of ignorance and sin, that he “ought to act in opposition to the Gospel and its patrons.”¹

There is a class of more decent claimants, who are equally remote from that state of heart which is required and approved by him who “desireth truth in the inward parts.” They are not deficient in sincerity with respect to their dealings with men. They are not chargeable with intended hypocrisy in their religious professions and devotions. Yet they fall short. There is no “truth in their inward parts.” They have never seen sin in its true light. They have never trembled at the word of God, while stigmatizing sin in its contrariety to the nature, will, and mind of God, and denouncing vengeance against it. They have never felt the necessity of atonement by the sacrifice of one Divine Person, and of justification by His righteousness; and they have never become conscious of the necessity of being regenerated by the almighty power of another Divine Person. If they could be persuaded to compare the real state of their hearts with their own confessions continually made in the house and presence of God, they would discover and be obliged to acknowledge the difference, the contrariety, the hostility, which prevails between them, and be brought to a conviction that “truth” dwells not “in their

¹ Acts xxvi. 9.

inward parts.” “ Truth,” is an exact correspondence between the words of the lips and the sensibilities of the soul,—between the tongue and the heart. O, that all would be persuaded to bring themselves to this test ! Let them look narrowly at the general confession with which their church opens its service—the Litany that follows, and the other confession in the Communion Service ; and honestly as in the presence of God inquire, ‘ Can I, truly and without hypocrisy, join in these humiliating formularies ? Do they express the actual prevailing and habitual feelings of my heart ? ’

Before we proceed to the second clause of our text, let us pause to remark the comfortable assurance contained in that which has been the subject of discussion. “ Thou desirest Truth in the inward parts.” Blessed be God for this assurance, given us by His inspiration through the pen of the Prophet David ! What is its import ? The soul that is truly humbled and abased is accepted in the sight of God, notwithstanding its natural guilt and pollution. It is the work of His own hands, the fruit of His own grace ; it corresponds with His merciful aim in redemption ; it glorifies, and will for ever glorify, all His perfections. Angels rejoice over every sinner that repenteth ; and with respect to such a sinner, it is said, “ The Lord thy God will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy : He will rest

in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." This, indeed, is spoken with a particular reference to converted Israel ; but it is applicable to the converted Gentile also. As at the conclusion of the first creation, when its Almighty and omniscient Author contemplated His work, and found (to speak after the manner of men) rest and satisfaction in it ; so in the contemplation of a greater work in the heart of a contrite sinner, the brightest display of His wisdom, power, and goodness, He is represented as finding rest, even, that satisfaction which results from this amazing exercise of His own infinite benevolence. " He delighteth in mercy."

Oh ! what a sweet consideration is this for one who is bending before the cross of his Saviour, in the spirit of self-loathing and humble hope,—hope founded on the revealed plan of salvation. God can be just in the justification of a sinner, even of my sinful soul. He can, adored be His wisdom and grace ! glorify Himself in me. In my salvation "mercy and truth will meet together, righteousness and peace will embrace each other." Who will not say, O for more of this broken and contrite spirit ! give me a deeper, a more habitual conviction of my need of a Saviour, and a livelier faith in His name, that God may be more glorified in me. " He will beautify the meek, or the contrite with salvation."

We proceed now to the second clause of our text, which describes

2. THE OBJECT OF FAITH AND PRAYER IN THE HEART OF EVERY SINCERE PENITENT. *“In the hidden part Thou wilt make me to understand wisdom.”*

Converting grace produces a oneness of will and aim between God and the regenerate soul. What God approves, the penitent sinner approves also in the inner man of the heart. The prophet's question,¹ “How can two walk together except they be agreed,” is applicable to the case before us. Is the Lord Jesus, in His mediatorial work, the object on which His Father delights to dwell? Does the Father of mercies, addressing Himself to His church, say, “Behold mine elect,” my chosen servant, “in whom my soul delighteth?”² Does He claim for His only begotten Son undivided attention and regard? The awakened sinner responds, with all the new-born sensibilities of his heart, to the voice from heaven which proclaims, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”³ Is it a prerequisite to this undivided regard, that the soul should be emptied of self in all its delusive forms, and so be abased before the cross? The penitent sinner implores grace that this frame of mind, which is essential to the glorification of the Saviour and to his own happiness, may be created, maintained, and daily increased.

¹ Amos iii. 3.

² Isa. xlii. 1.

³ Matt. iii. 17, and xvii. 5.

The second clause of our text is the echo of a contrite heart to the former clause. God requires "Truth in the inward parts:" the penitent, apprised of this gracious requisition, delays not to express his earnest desire and confident expectation, that God will, by His almighty power, produce in him that which he requires. Here we may remark one constant effect of Divine influence. It teaches its recipient to turn every precept and every promise into the language of prayer. Conscious of utter impotence, the penitent sinner carries every want to the throne of grace. His feeling then is this, "Lord, give what Thou requirest; and then require what Thou wilt."

The copulative particle which connects the two clauses of our text implies this correspondence between the revelation of the Divine will on the one part, and the desire and prayer of the penitent heart on the other. "Thou desirest Truth in the inward parts, *and* in the hidden part Thou wilt make me to know wisdom." "What I want, Thou hast promised to give." Repentance and faith are the gifts of God, and the awakened mind is conscious that they are so. It has made a frequent experiment of its own powers; and the experiment has constantly and utterly failed. Our Lord has told us, in his account of the work of His Spirit on the Soul, that it is His prerogative to "convince of sin, of righteousness, and

of judgment ;” or to awaken the torpid heart to a sense of its guilt, pollution, and danger,—to comfort it, when awakened, by revealing the atonement made by the Son of God in all its virtue,—and thereby to sanctify the affections by directing them to Him who alone is worthy of them. This is the work of grace in its commencement, progress, and accomplishment. This is the end proposed by the Holy Scriptures, by the ordinances of Christian worship, by the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, by the preaching of the Gospel, by the outward afflictions of life, by the inward temptations of the wicked one, by the withdrawals of Divine consolations, by death, and by the beatific vision. But it is the Spirit of God,—omnipotent agency,—which gives efficacy to the means that are ordained for this glorious purpose. It is He who “worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Life must exist and be maintained by a communication with the Spirit of life, in order that medicine, food, and exercise, may conduce to the restoration of health, either in the body or the soul.

The conviction of impotence, and the exercise of faith in the Divine promise, which are implied in the words of our text, are evidences, clear and satisfactory, of an enlightened state of soul. Before a sinner arrives at this state, there is, generally speaking, an interval of fruitless endea-

vour to excite in himself, by his own efforts, those sensibilities which God requires and approves. But he exhausts himself in the abortive trial. He is at length reduced to a state of self-despair, and then he learns to adopt the language of the text. This process may in some instances occupy a longer period than in others. Various circumstances might be adduced as occasioning this variety. But though the length of the process may differ, and there may be a variety also in the outward means employed for carrying it on to its issue, the process itself is indispensable. Conviction of our own utter helplessness is equally necessary with a conviction of guilt and pollution. “No man can come unto me except the Father who hath sent Me draw him.”¹

The conviction of utter helplessness, implied in the connexion of the two clauses of which our text consists, is a most blessed state of mind. It may be said of him who is under its influence, “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but *thy* Father who is in heaven.” It calls in (and it cannot call in vain) the aid of almighty arm, of an all-sufficient grace. When a vacuum is thus produced, the air of heaven will flow in to fill the void. This expiration of the soul in prayer will be followed by inspiration of the Spirit of God in His saving and comforting

¹ John vi. 44.

influence. All the blessings of the Gospel are insured to those who are truly seeking them, and they are therefore called “the sure mercies of David;” being laid up in Him, who is the “*Beloved*” of the Father, for all who believe in His name. Indeed, more than this may be asserted. The desire is itself possession. “He that seeketh findeth.” No better evidence of a pardoned state need be looked for, than the desire after pardon, sought for in God’s appointed way of bestowing it: no better evidence of a state of sanctification need be sought for, than a desire after deliverance from sin, as being hateful to God, and the disease and disgrace of the soul.

We proceed to notice the association of terms which the Spirit of inspiration has used in describing that state of heart which God requires and approves, and which the penitent sinner implores Him to produce within his soul. These are *Truth* and *Wisdom*. They are correlatives, and signify the same state of mind in different aspects. “TRUTH” we have considered as being that from which the carnal mind is utterly estranged; and which converting grace produces wherever it is vouchsafed. It is a correspondence between the conviction of the heart of a sinner, and the reality of his state before God. This in the second clause is called *Wisdom*.

But what is WISDOM? In answering this question the circumstances of man must be taken into

the account. He is an immortal and responsible creature. His existence on earth is limited to a very short period ; but he is to live for ever in happiness or misery. And if practical wisdom consist in the adoption of proper means for securing our own happiness, it must, as exercised by man, look forward to eternity, and be chiefly occupied in what relates to a future, a never-ending state of existence. The present state, apart from that, is not, comparatively, worth a thought. The acquisition of wealth or honour is not wisdom. It cannot consist in obtaining for ourselves any measure of carnal or worldly gratification. A knowledge of all the languages spoken on the earth would not, of itself, be wisdom ; nor would the most extensive acquaintance with all the arts and sciences connected with the present state of things, deserve the name. All these perish in the using. They are unadapted to the nature and wants of the soul, and they are not coeval with its existence. They can be of no use whatever beyond the short and precarious span of this mortal life.

But what does the word of God eulogize as true wisdom ; for it is from thence we must learn the import of this word as it occurs in our text ? The Scriptures are their own interpreter. Wisdom then in the Scriptures is synonymous with religion—with Godliness, or a supreme regard to God, as the only fountain of happiness to a

rational creature. It is such a regard to Him as makes His favour the grand object of pursuit, and communion with Him the exclusive source of felicity. This in the Scriptures is denominated wisdom, and ungodliness folly, while those who want the former are stigmatized as fools.

But a further question remains to be answered. What is godliness in the bosom of a *fallen* creature, such as our Psalm has described man to be? What is the wisdom of a guilty, polluted, and helpless sinner? Is it not the cultivation of that frame of mind which we have already considered under the notion of Truth? Is it not contrition of spirit, and submission to the righteousness of God,—humiliation and a thankful acquiescence in the provision revealed in the Gospel of Christ? It consists in “Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.”

That this is a just definition of wisdom, as existing in the soul of man, reason will concur with revelation in assuring us. The instinct of a brute creature, possessed only of an animal life, a life extending only to a few minutes, hours, days, or years, looks no further than to a provision for animal existence—a provision for the present moment. Yet to the skilful ant the Scripture refers us for a pattern of wisdom. But man, a compound being, a fallen being, an immortal being, must have a provision for eternal life, or be for ever wretched. Wisdom, in our case,

must consist, therefore, in making provision for the wants of a spirit during the eternity to which we are hastening—in adopting proper means for this momentous object. These God has revealed, and it is wisdom to embrace them, while the most egregious folly, folly which no epithets can fully stigmatize, is manifested by him who neglects them. He may say to his soul, “Soul, take thine ease: thou hast goods laid up for many years—eat, drink, and be merry.” But God may say, “Thou fool, this night is thy soul required of thee!”¹

The knowledge spoken of in our text, may be information in the mind, or experience in the heart; for the verb is used in Scripture in both these senses. It signifies mental comprehension,—or sensation. As here used, it may be taken in its largest signification. “Thou shalt make me to know wisdom,” that is, to understand its nature and to feel its power. The necessity of Divine instruction relates to both. It is a provision both for the mind and the heart. The mind cannot comprehend what true religion is, without enlightening grace; for “the natural man,” whatever advantages of mental culture he may have enjoyed, “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are

¹ Luke xii. 20.

spiritually discerned.”¹ Much less, can one who is dead in trespasses and sins, possess those sensibilities, in which spiritual wisdom, considered under the notion of experience, consists. The heart cannot feel, but as God softens and impresses it. The stone is too hard for a hammer of natural temperature to break, though wielded by the most powerful finite arm. Education and human discipline avail nothing without the accompanying “demonstration of the Spirit.” The ice of the affections is too intensely frozen to be thawed by the glow-worm-fire of moral suasion and philosophy. As God provided the atonement for us, He must create the power of reciprocity in us. All saving knowledge is from above. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”² Hence the wisdom of the penitent’s prayer and expectation in our text is fully manifest—“Thou wilt cause me to know wisdom.”

The important addition made to the verb in our text, may be rendered as in our Bible version, “in the hidden parts,” or as it is in the Psalter version in an adverbial form, “secretly.” We find in the New Testament similar expressions; thus St. Paul speaks of “the inner man,”³ and St. Peter of “the hidden man of the heart.”⁴

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

² James i. 5.

³ Rom. vii. 22. Eph. iii. 16.

⁴ 1 Peter iii. 4.

The restriction corresponds with that of “the inward parts” in the former clause.

The limitation may refer, either to the *mode of instruction, its seat, or its nature.*

The mode is secret. It is carried on in “the hidden part” of man, the heart. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.”¹ The wind is subject neither to the will nor power of man; and though its effects are manifest and sensibly perceived, yet its mode of operation is inscrutable.—*The seat* of this instruction is “the inner man of the heart.” There the regenerate state commences. There, its origin and its process, its conflicts and its comforts, are concealed from the view of all but its Divine Author. “To Him all hearts are open, all desires known; and from Him no secrets are hid.” While the world scowls at the Christian as an hypocrite, and charges him, on the one hand, with Antinomian licentiousness, because he avows that he has no hope but in the atonement of his Saviour; and on the other, with pharisaic pride, because he renounces the pomps and vanities of this wicked world; it is his privilege and comfort to make his appeal to the Searcher of all hearts for “the simplicity

¹ John iii. 8.

and Godly sincerity” of which he is conscious. *The nature* of this wisdom is also secret. The Apostle calls it “the hidden wisdom.” It is “the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him.” It is “the mystery of faith in a good conscience.” It is not within the ken of human sagacity. But it is known and approved of God, and is understood by those, and those only, who are taught by him.

The application of our subject to the consciences of individuals involves no difficulty. It arises out of the consonance which our text states as existing between the requisition of the Gospel and the desire of the penitent soul. “Thou requirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden man Thou wilt make me to know wisdom.” The production of this consonance is conversion, the effect of regenerating grace. For this one of the collects of our church¹ has taught us to pray in the following appropriate words:—‘O Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful man; grant unto Thy people, that they may love the thing which Thou commandeth, and desire that which Thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ Does this

¹ For the fourth Sunday after Easter.

prayer express the sincere, the habitual state of our own souls ? We have joined in it ; but has it been the language of the heart, as well as of the lips ? Be it remembered, that submission to the righteousness of God, implying a consciousness of our guilty, polluted, and helpless state as sinners, and a thankful acceptance of salvation, as the free gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, is the primary act of obedience which God requires of His sinful creatures. Without this, all supposed obedience to the law of God is disobedience. “ Without faith it is impossible to please God.” ‘ Works done before the (justifying) grace of Christ, and the (regenerating) inspiration of His Spirit are *not* pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ,’ and consequently are not the effects of love to God. ‘ Yea rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.’¹ O that the members of the church of England would consider wherein they profess to differ from the church of Rome, from which they have separated, and what was the main ground of that separation ! That they would weigh the doctrines of the Reformation, as they are stated in the articles of their own church, by the balance to the sanctuary ! That they could be induced

¹ Article 13.

to bring the convictions of their own consciences and the sensibilities of their own hearts, to the standard of those articles ! Were this done, how many who are loud and vehement in their pretensions to Protestantism, and their zeal for its prevalence ; how many who have clamoured for, ‘ Protestant ascendancy,’ and have denounced the papacy with unmeasured obloquy ; would find themselves, as to the radical points of Protestant belief, to be still papists in heart, and dissenters in principle from the church of England ! Our text affords the touchstone. It is an honest contrite renunciation of all personal righteousness, and submission to that righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ.

PSALM LI. 7, 8.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.

SIN, in its guilt and polluting influence, was still uppermost in the thoughts of the royal penitent. God had indeed pronounced, by the mouth of His authorised ambassador, Nathan, the sentence of absolution ; but David could not so easily forgive himself. He could not obliterate from his remembrance the odious nature of sin ; nor had he a wish to do so.

That we are justified in considering this Psalm as a model of true penitence, to be imitated by all who profess to be members of the church of England, and to be adopted as the language of their own souls, is evident not only from the use which is made of it in our service, when it occurs in the course of our daily lessons of the Psalms, but more especially from its appointment to be recited on the solemn day of humiliation which introduces the season of Lent, and from the manner in which it is then directed to be used.

‘Then shall they all kneel upon their knees,’ *all* who have been addressed in the foregoing exhortation, ‘and the priests and clerks shall say this Psalm,’ in which all who are assembled are to join. And it will be recollected that the use of this penitential confession of sin is connected with the preceding exhortation, and that the exhortation reminds those to whom it is addressed, that, besides the flagrant acts of transgression which are before denounced, in quotations from the Scriptures, as bringing down the curse of God on their perpetrators, “all they are accursed (as the Prophet David beareth witness) who do err and go astray from the commandments of God.” And as all the congregation have before confessed that they, individually and collectively, ‘have erred and strayed from God’s ways like lost sheep’ the inference is unquestionable that the church considers all her members as naturally accursed of God, as being (to use the scriptural language of her Catechism) ‘by nature children of wrath ;’ and that she instructs them, by the use of this Psalm in her Communion Service, to confess and deplore their own sinfulness, whether by imputation, derivation, or perpetration. ‘There is no health *in us.*’ To every contrite soul the confessions and supplications of our Psalm will be recommended by their adaptation to personal experience. Every such worshipper will be enabled to join in every

verse, using the appropriating personal pronoun in the singular number, as its Divinely instructed author has himself used it.

In the verses which have now been recited, David shews the knowledge he possessed of the only way of salvation. His confession of faith, contained in the text, proves that he was not a stranger to the Gospel scheme. On this vital subject Old Testament saints were not so ignorant as many suppose them to have been. ‘The Old Testament is not contrary to the New : for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises.’¹ The language of the Old Testament church, indeed, differs from that of believers who have lived and written since the coming of Christ ; but the faith and hope of the former were the same as those of the latter. Christianity is as old as the Fall ; it was then revealed for the comfort of the penitent sinner ; and it has, in all ages, been the only basis of confidence, and the only source of consolation to the awakened soul. What part is there of the history of Jesus that is not anticipated in the Psalms of David ?

¹ Article 7.

The confession of faith, which is contained in our text, divides itself into two branches. It relates

1. TO THE PARDON OF SIN.

2. TO THE BLESSINGS WHICH FOLLOW UPON PARDON, viz. “Joy and peace in believing.”

In the 7th verse we have

1. THE ROYAL PENITENT’S CONFESSION OF HIS FAITH IN DIVINE MERCY FOR THE PARDON OF HIS SIN.

I have called the Psalmist’s language a confession of faith ; for though it assumes in our version the form of supplication, the verbs, being in the future tense, express the faith and hope of the penitent heart: “Thou shalt (or wilt) purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; Thou shalt (or wilt) wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

Should it be asked, in what sense David could speak of pardon as yet to be obtained, since Nathan had, by the authority of God, already assured him that “the Lord had put away his sin ;” several solutions of the difficulty may be given. Though the temporal penalty of his offences, both of which were made capital by the law of Sinai, (not to mention the law given to Noah) had been remitted, he might not be fully assured that the guilt of them was so absolved as to exempt him from all danger of

punishment in a future world. But if he understood the sentence of absolution as extending both to the temporal and eternal penalty of his sin, yet his conscience had not yet felt the full effect of pardoning mercy. The penitent believer will understand such hesitation on the momentous subject. The awakened conscience is slow in receiving the doctrine of a free and full pardon, vouchsafed through the Redeemer's sufferings. It is prone to question the possibility of such amazing grace, especially in its own instance. Can such iniquities as mine be freely and at once blotted out? Must not something be done, or suffered, by myself, in order to secure the stupendous boon? The awakened mind is jealous. It fears a deception where so great a stake as that of eternal life is concerned. Though it may be satisfied respecting the all-sufficiency of the atonement made, and know that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth (that is, hath virtue to cleanse) from all sin;" yet it still fears lest there should be some defect in the application,—lest that which is freely offered should not be duly received. There is, moreover, a sense in which the blessing may be viewed as future throughout the Christian life. For the sentence of the supreme court will not be judicially and publicly pronounced, till the day of final judgment. In the interval, the question lies in the secret communion of God with the soul; and the assur-

ance of pardon will ebb and flow, like the tide, with the varied exercises of faith in Jesus. It is the light of the Sun of righteousness, reflected by the oracles of truth in His church, which causes the spring-tide of spiritual peace and joy in the heart. The absence of that light produces an ebb in the waters of spiritual consolation. In the instance of David, this variety of experience may be traced by several of his Psalms ; and the penitent believer in the present day, will be at no loss to find the counterpart of that varied experience.

David had, however, what St. Paul speaks of as “ a good hope through grace ; ” and this he expresses in the words of our text. The object of his faith was an atoning Saviour ; and the basis of his hope, the all-sufficiency of His meritorious cross and passion. The warranty for faith and hope in him was the Divine institution of sacrifice. This institution taught him what the great Deliverer was to be, to do, and to suffer ; and what effects would result, retrospectively as well as prospectively, from His sacrifice. Like Abraham, he saw the day of Christ, and was gladdened by the sight. This is testified by many of his Psalms. How much stronger is the ground of consolation afforded to us, since the Redeemer cried on the cross, “ It is finished,”—and hath “ risen again for our justification.” Of ancient believers it is testified, “ that they all

died in faith, not having received the promises ; but having seen ” the promised blessings “ afar off,” they “ were persuaded of them and embraced them ” in the affections of their souls. But what was seen by them through a long vista of faith, has been realized to us by the incarnation, sufferings, death, and resurrection of the long expected Saviour of the world.

The great “ mystery of Godliness ” is plainly intimated in the word which the Psalmist has used to express his confident expectation of pardon. “ Thou shalt purge me,” or provide an atonement for my sin. The substantive, in its primary moral signification, means *sin*. We have found it used in this sense in the second and third verses of our Psalm. But it also signifies a sin-offering, or the means of atonement for sin, and is constantly employed in the Book of Leviticus to describe one of the various species of sacrifice which were Divinely enjoined for this purpose. Hence St. Paul says, that Christ “ was made sin ” (or a sin-offering) “ for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him ; ” and in his Epistle to the Romans, that “ God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin,” (or as it is in the margin, ‘ by a sacrifice for sin ’) “ condemned sin in the flesh.” And hence, in our text, the Hebrew word, in a verbal form, signifies to expiate, or purify by a sin-offering ; so that David not only

expresses a hope of pardon, but describes the way in which he expected to obtain it. His was not the hope of Cain, or of more modern deists, who think that an act of homage is a sufficient recommendation to the favour of God, or that repentance is a compensation for sin. No: he knew that “without shedding of blood there is no remission;” that “peace” could only be made, between God and man, “by the blood of the cross.”

If we consider the circumstances of David's case more closely, we shall see reason to conclude that, in the expiation of sin to which he refers, he had in his eyes the great atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God. No typical offering was appointed for such sins as those of which he had been guilty. The adulterer and murderer were to be put to death. The blood of bulls and goats could not free the transgressor from even the temporal penalty of such crimes. To this exception he seems to allude in the 18th verse. He could therefore have no reference, in expressing his hope of mercy, to any other sacrifice than that of Him, whose sufferings he often details in terms so direct and circumstantial that they look rather like history than prophecy. The sacrifice of the Messiah he knew would avail even for sins of a crimson hue.

Blessed be God! This all availing sacrifice has been offered and accepted, and its efficacy

is attested by a great cloud of witnesses, multitudes of whom have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and are now before the throne of God ; while their successors here on earth, living and dying, are daily adding their testimony that the Lord Jesus saves to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Oh ! let the penitent sinner lift up his eyes to the cross of Christ ; he will not look in vain. Let him contemplate the glorious object there presented to his view, till his conscience is relieved from the burden of guilt, and till, with admiring gratitude, he is enabled to say, “ He loved me and gave Himself for me.” Still let him continue to look to Jesus, that his heart may be continually inflamed with love, and that his affections and his life may be constantly actuated by the conviction. “ I am not my own, but I am bought with a price,” and that price my Saviour’s own blood. In the mention of “ hyssop,” there is a further allusion to the law of sacrifice. This herb, probably in consequence of its deterative and cleansing qualities, was directed to be used in sprinkling the blood of the paschal Lamb,¹ and, perhaps, was an ingredient in the sauce appointed to be eaten with it. It was, moreover, employed in the purification of the leper ;² it made a component part of the water of purifica-

¹ Exodus xii. 22.

² Levit. iv. 6, 51, 52.

tion ; and the sprinkler in its application to the subject which was to be purified with it, was a bunch of hyssop.¹

Hyssop was, it may be supposed, a type of the *bitterness*, both of those sufferings by which sin was to be expiated, and of that repentance which accompanies their application to the conscience. David understood the import of the levitical institution, and felt the necessity of an application to his conscience of that blood, of which the blood of all legal sacrifices was a prefiguration. “Thou shalt, or wilt, purge me with hyssop.” ‘Thou wilt apply the means of atonement, which Thou hast provided, to my guilty soul. Thou, who art the author both of faith and repentance, wilt enable me to appropriate the all-availing propitiation to my own soul.’ David felt, what every penitent is made to feel, and that, often, after a series of laboured efforts and bitter disappointments, the necessity of an Almighty agency, not only in providing the meritorious mean of atonement, but in enabling the awakened mind to apply the revelation of that atonement to its own relief. Faith is the effect of the same agency which raised the body of Jesus from the grave :² and that agency is called by St. Paul “the exceeding greatness of the power of God to usward who believe.”

¹ Numb. ix. 6, 18.

² Eph. i. 19, 20.

The verb by which the Psalmist further explains his meaning in the latter clause of the verse, is the same which we have already considered, when it occurred in the second verse of the Psalm. “Thou wilt wash me.” This illustrates the effect ascribed to the atoning sacrifice ; and the more so, since this verb, as we remarked before, is only applied to the internal purification of its subject, while another word is used for superficial washing.

The effect which the Psalmist expected to follow from the act of grace which he implored, was a perfect purification of his conscience from the guilt of his sins. “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” What can be “whiter than snow ?” Nothing on earth, except the soul that is purified by the blood of Jesus. Oh ! what wonder-working virtue is there in that blood ! A soul black as hell, whose blackness of guilt is as inveterate as the skin of the Ethiopian, or the spots of the leopard, (both of which are natural and not accidental) washed in the stream of “blood and water” from the Saviour’s side, becomes, at once, “whiter than snow.”

O let the penitent listen to the reasoning of Divine compassion with himself, and with all who are like minded. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow ; though they

be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”¹ God condescends to argue the case with the repentant sinner; and in the course of the argument, He sets before the sinner’s eyes the cross of Christ. Though the disputation may be a protracted one, the conclusive syllogism at length prevails to terminate the contest. ‘The blood of Jesus Christ, my Son, cleanseth from all sin,—It was shed for all, and its virtue belongs to all those who feel their need of it. Through My grace, you, afflicted soul, have been made to feel that need. It was, therefore, shed for you, and you are cleansed by it.’ In this contest, while the penitent sinner draws his alarming conclusion from the greatness of his guilt, the imperfection of his repentance, the weakness of his faith, and the still remaining corruptions of his heart;—the Father of mercies draws His conclusions from Calvary, asserts the satisfaction given to His justice, the honour put on His law, the glory secured to all His attributes, by the incarnation, sufferings, and death of Immanuel. He says, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And, surely, that which satisfies and honours Me, ought to satisfy the conscience of returning sinners. “I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” It is “for

¹ Isaiah i. 18.

His own sake," because Christ and His Father are One.

We proceed now to consider—

2. THE BLESSINGS WHICH FOLLOW THE PARDON OF SIN. "*Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice.*" Verse 8.

This verse is constructed like the former. The principal verb is in the future tense. "Thou wilt make me to hear joy and gladness, &c." It is a confession of faith. 'Though I am still oppressed with a sense of my sin, yet am I persuaded that Thou, O my merciful God, wilt, in due time, give me "the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." I am assured that "they who sow in tears, shall reap in joy;" and that, "he who goeth on his way weeping, bearing precious seed, shall, doubtless, come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." "I am waiting for Thy salvation, O Lord."

Let us remark, as we proceed, the connexion between the two verses of our text, implying that the blessings of the latter necessarily follow the blessing spoken of in the former; or, that joy and gladness are the sure consequence of a sense of pardoning mercy vouchsafed to the penitent soul. Indeed, nothing but the hope of being forgiven can impart joy to a truly contrite heart. While guilt prevails in the conscience, not only

must the world, and whatever it affords, be insipid ; but the apprehension of Divine displeasure precludes all spiritual enjoyment, renders duty toilsome, ordinances barren of comfort, and death the object of terror. It is no wonder then that the Psalmist has connected spiritual peace and joy with pardoning mercy as cause and effect ; and that he has given precedence to pardon, as that which must be obtained by those who would participate in the comforts of religion.

The hope of pardon, according, to the degree in which it prevails, must be accompanied with “ joy and gladness.” For what does not a pardoned state imply ? It is a state of acceptance with God, a restoration to His favour. It is eternal life begun in the soul. It is a translation “ out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.” It is a transition from death to life, from a consciousness of condemnation to that of reconciliation with God. It is the earnest and first fruits of future glory. Hence, we find, on consulting the records of the primitive church, that the Gospel, which is a revelation of pardoning mercy, proved to those who received it a source of joy. Witness the case of the Philippian gaoler, of the Samaritans to whom Philip “ preached Jesus,” and of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Indeed an appeal to the believer’s experience will, in every instance,

illustrate the connexion of which we have been speaking.

But let us remark, further, the beautiful climax which exists in this part of our text. The first of the three words by which the effect of pardoning grace is described, expresses triumphant exultation ; the second word describes that delightful palpitation of the heart which joy produces ; and the third, the cheerful motion of the whole body. The bones which had been broken, are set and invigorated, so that they dance for joy.

The emphasis of the description is increased by this reference to past and painful experience. "The bones which Thou hast broken shall rejoice," or exult. The contrast is striking. Broken bones are affecting symbols of anguish and helplessness. Conviction of sin produces a sense of both. In this state all is misery and despair. But when God speaks peace to the conscience, the soul is relieved from its torture and strengthened for duty. Then "the joy of the Lord" becomes the penitent's "strength," and he goes on his way rejoicing. To this purpose are the interrogatories of Elihu :¹ "When God giveth quietness, who then can make trouble ? and when He hideth His face, who then can behold Him ? whether it be done against a nation,

¹ Job xxxiv. 29.

or against a man only." The favour of God is the only legitimate cause of joy. There are indeed natural circumstances which give occasion for pleasure and satisfaction of mind, which is only censurable when excessive, or considered as lasting or supreme. There are also sinful occasions of joy; for "folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom."¹ But our natural and sinful joys are but "the crackling of thorns under a pot,"—a blaze, and no more. They quickly become extinct. Mark the contrast between the beatitudes and the woes, which proceeded from the lips of Incarnate Wisdom: "Blessed are ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now; for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh. But woe unto you that are rich; for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full; for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now; for ye shall mourn and weep."² "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment."³

The pleasurable sensations which we suppose to have their origin in the right source, must be scrutinized and brought to the touchstone of Scripture, lest they deceive us to our ruin. That touchstone the text affords us. Unless our re-

¹ Prov. iv. 21.² Luke vi. 20. &c.³ Job xx. 5.

joicing arises from the healing of bones which God has broken, it is fallacious. Herod heard the baptist with gladness of heart. The stony ground hearers are represented as receiving the word with joy. But in neither of these cases was the pleasure which was felt preceded by repentance towards God, that is, by the pungent anguish and conscious inability of broken bones. It originated in self-approbation, and terminated in ungodliness. No deep and abiding conviction of the forfeiture of Divine favour by sin,—no consciousness of the indispensable necessity of that favour and of communion with God to the happiness of a rational being, had been produced;—no humiliation of heart had taken place, no alienation from the world, or from self-righteous hopes. Such joy is quite compatible with a carnal state, and a worldly sensual life. Whereas the “kingdom of God” in the heart, “is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” It is holy in its origin, its tendency, and its result.

Oh! let us bring our joys to this test. If the devils were subject to us through the name of Christ, this would not, of itself, be a solid cause for joy. This our Lord limits to an inscription of our names in heaven, or a restoration to the favour of God, through faith in His own name. And the comfortable knowledge of such inscription is confined to those who have been regene-

rated by Him, whose prerogative it is to convince “of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment,” or, in other words, to penitent believers in the Lord Jesus. They, and they only, have cause for rejoicing. Theirs is that Spirit of mourning which our Lord, in one of his beatitudes, makes an essential prerequisite to solid, spiritual, everlasting consolation. They, and they only, can enter into “the joy of their Lord.”

But let us remark the manner in which the penitent Psalmist expected this income of joy to be produced. “Thou shalt *make me to hear* joy and gladness.” “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;” and the proper fruits of hearing are “joy and peace in believing” that word. We have no reason to suppose that David waited for any immediate revelation on the subject. What he wanted was power to believe the message of Nathan, or the general testimony of the word of God, as verbally expressed, or conveyed by the typical rites to which he refers in the 7th verse. Much less have we any reason to expect, or any cause to wish for a particular revelation to satisfy our own minds. The revelation of mercy, as to the mind and will of God, is finished; and any expectation from dreams, visions, or other extraordinary interposition, is enthusiastic, in the bad sense of the term, and dishonourable to the Scriptures, as it charges them with insufficiency

for the purpose for which God has given them to us. These, “given by inspiration of God,” are “profitable for doctrine and for instruction in righteousness ;” and are fully competent to accomplish that of which they are appointed to be the instruments. The word of God is the warrant of faith. The existence of a penitent state of heart, or, to use the metaphorical language of our text, a consciousness of “broken bones,” is a more sure word of prophecy, with respect to our state and prospects, than the testimony of an angel from heaven would be.

But still God only can effectually apply His own word. “The excellency of the power,” which makes this application, belongs to God, and not to the minister who preaches, or the penitent who hears. “The demonstration of the Spirit” is an essential prerequisite to spiritual and holy joy. He who brake the bones which require healing, must himself heal them. Their pain may be lulled by worldly opiates,—their impotence may be unfelt in a state of spiritual inaction,—as in a case of natural fracture: but a sound cure can only be effected by Divine influence. The soul remains deaf to the voice of the charmer, speaking in the Scriptures, till its ear is unstopped. And therefore faith, in its rise and increase, is called “faith of the operation of God.”

Let us review the doctrine of our text. We

have considered it as David's confession of faith in relation to the hope of pardoning mercy, and the effects of that mercy. We also profess to believe in "the forgiveness of sins." But has our confession of faith in this momentous article, been uttered, when we have joined the congregation in reciting the Apostle's Creed, with those feelings of humiliation, desire, and hope, which have been attributed to the penitent sinner? Have we felt the indispensable necessity of obtaining the blessing for ourselves? Has its importance dwelt on our minds with any becoming pressure of want and expectation? Have we been led to the cross of Christ as the channel of its conveyance: and to the Holy Spirit of promise, as the only agent who can effectually apply the doctrine to our comfort and salvation? Have we felt, and has our daily walk and conversation borne witness to the conviction, that a restoration to the favour of God is that which we long for and pursue above all other objects whatsoever? While others are inquiring, "Who will shew us any good;" has the language of our souls been, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon me?" This, this, is the one thing needful," "For this shall every one that is Godly," every partaker of Divine mercy, "make his prayer unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found."

Is the word of God, the charter of all our

hopes and privileges, the subject of our daily study ? Upon this the doctrine of “ the forgiveness of sins,” its possibility, the channel of its conveyance, and the mode of its application, is exclusively founded. Do we read the Bible in order that we may become experimentally acquainted with this blessing in all its relations, as God is its author, Christ its channel, and the Holy Ghost the agent in its application to the conscience ? Are we prepared, on hearing the delightful assurance “ Thy sins are forgiven,” to love much, because much has been forgiven ?

PSALM LI. 9, 10.

Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

ONE mode in which earnestness in application for Divine mercy discovers itself, is a frequent repetition of the request. Thus the Syrophenician woman urged her suit, notwithstanding the discouragement she met with, until she succeeded. Its object was too important to be lightly abandoned. Thus also blind Bartimeus persisted in his petition, though our Lord's disciples would have driven him away, until he obtained a restoration of his sight. The delay, and the opposition he experienced, increased the energy of his prayer ; and, repeating the same words he had before used, he cried more vehemently, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." The Restorer of sight to the blind was now within the sound of his voice, and might not again visit the place of his abode. The opportunity was too precious to be lost, the benefit he sought too great to admit of a mere

cursory attempt to secure it.¹ The importunity of faith manifests no anxiety about novelty of phrase, or elegance of speech. The expression of real desire is eloquent only by its sincerity, its earnestness, and its perseverance. It is the intercession of the Spirit within,—the groaning which cannot fully be uttered,—but which He who reads the heart, and knows the mind of the Spirit, accepts, and owns, and answers.²

That such a discovery of earnestness is pleasing to Him to whom it is addressed, is evident from the eulogy He pronounced on the faith of the Syrophenician, and from the success which attended the reiterated cry of Bartimeus. It is moreover evident from the parable of the importunate widow, uttered for the express purpose of teaching us, “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” through delay or discouragement.³ It is likewise evident from our Lord’s own example, when in His agony, He “prayed thrice, more earnestly using the same words,”⁴ Perhaps language is not to be conceived more appropriate to express the feelings of a soul spiritually alive and in earnest, than that which is found in the Litany of our church. Let the penitent endeavour to enter into its spirit, and to make it the language of his own heart. ‘Son

¹ Luke xviii. 35, &c.

² Rom. viii. 26, 27.

³ Luke xviii. 1, &c.

⁴ Matt. xxvi. 36, &c. Mark xiv. 32, &c. Luke xxii. 39, &c.

of God, we beseech Thee to hear us—O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us Thy peace—O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us—O Christ, hear us—Lord, have mercy upon us—Christ, have mercy upon us—Lord, have mercy upon us.’—If this language be ever that of formality, the fault is not in the form, but in the lips that use it; or, rather, in the heart of stone that is unmoved by it.

These remarks have been occasioned by our text, which contains a repetition of the prayer for pardoning mercy before offered by the penitent Psalmist in the second verse. It was not a “vain repetition.” It was the dictation of “the Spirit of prayer and supplication,” poured out on his soul. Such repetitions are symptoms of grace, which gladden the hearts of the angels of God, who rejoice “over every sinner that repenteth.”

We have to consider in the words now before us—

1. A RENEWED PRAYER FOR PARDONING MERCY, SPOKEN OF IN A TWOFOLD POINT OF VIEW. “*Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.*” Verse 9. And

2. A PRAYER FOR ITS INSEPARABLE ATTENDANT, SANCTIFYING GRACE, WHICH IS ALSO SPOKEN OF IN A TWOFOLD MANNER. “*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.*” Verse 10.

1. THE RENEWED PRAYER FOR PARDONING MERCY.

Every aspect which the pardoning grace of God assumes in the record which reveals it, must be deeply interesting to those who feel their need of it. That record presents it to our notice in a variety of views. It sometimes appears as atonement provided for the guilt of sin, sometimes as the remission of a debt, as purification from uncleanness, as a forgetfulness of injury sustained, as a restoration to favour, as an exaltation to glory, as eternal life. At least, if pardoning grace does not strictly comprehend all these inestimable blessings, it is inseparably connected with them. It is the first link in the golden chain of mercy, which terminates in everlasting salvation.

The prayer of the text is founded on the confession of faith in the two former verses. The penitent had declared his assurance of the availableness of the great atonement, and his persuasion that God would so apply its virtue to his own case, that the bones which had been broken by conviction of sin should rejoice. This assurance and this persuasion afford him encouragement to pray for what God could bestow, consistently with His own attributes and to His own glory ; and what He has promised in His word to bestow on every sincere applicant for it. Prayer for mercy is founded on believing views

of a Divine revelation concerning it. Independent of this revelation, there could be no prayer on earth, as there is none in hell, because no proposal of pardoning grace extends thither. True prayer is the fruit of faith, not indeed always of assured and appropriating faith in the promise of pardoning grace, but of faith in the all-sufficiency of the atonement. This alone can afford a basis for the expectation of success. An unawakened conscience may satisfy itself with resolutions of future amendment; but he who is taught of God knows that "the wages of sin is death," and that, without an expiation, sin must issue in the destruction of the sinner.

The prayer of our text speaks of pardon in a twofold point of view. God is invoked to hide His face from the sin of the penitent sinner, and to blot out all his iniquities.

The notion of hiding the face, so as not to behold sin, is not of common occurrence in Scripture; but that of covering sin from sight, which does occur several times, is much to the same purpose.¹ The former phrase evidently imports the turning away the face from the sight of sin, so as not to regard it with an intention of punishment; while the latter implies the interposition of something which conceals it from view. As God is omniscient, He cannot be

¹ Psalm xxxii. 1. lxxxv. 3. Neh. iv. 5.

ignorant of its existence ; as He is holy, He cannot but hate it ; and as He is just, He cannot avoid fulfilling the threatening of His law. But some other object may attract His attention, pacify His wrath, and satisfy His justice. To that object the penitent directs attention. It is the sacrifice of atonement which Himself has provided and appointed to be the means of reconciliation. Some other object may be interposed between the eye of justice and sin. That interposing object is the Saviour's cross. A beautiful illustration of this view of our subject is found in the Holy of Holies under the Levitical dispensation. The Cherubim therein placed were representatives of the Divine Majesty.¹ Their station was on the mercy-seat, the propitiatory or lid of the ark. That mercy-seat was a type of Christ.² He is the reality of that which the lid or covering of the ark represented to ancient penitents. In the ark itself were deposited the tables of the law, the standards of right and wrong, by which was and "is the knowledge of sin." But these were concealed from view by the mercy-seat. The eyes of the Cherubic witnesses, as directed downwards towards those tables,³ saw only the golden propitiatory, which was annually sprinkled in their presence with atoning blood.

¹ Ezek. i. 28.

² Romans iii. 25.

³ Exod. xxv. 20.

Jesus is “the propitiation for our sins;” and, by claiming Divine regard to Himself, He turns away from the person of the penitent believer the eye and the sword of righteous indignation. He says, “I have found the ransom” required to satisfy the claims of law and justice. For this purpose He presents Himself before the throne as “the Lamb newly slain;” and this presentation of Himself is the essence of His promised intercession. With a knowledge of this intercession, the penitent is encouraged to say, “Hide thy face from my sins.”

The second notion of forgiveness is that of blotting out iniquity. There are three scriptural views of pardoning mercy, which are connected with the idea of “blotting out sin.”

Sin is sometimes represented as a debt contracted by man; and God is represented as the Creditor. For example, in the prayer which our Lord taught His disciples, one of the petitions, according to St. Matthew’s edition of it, runs thus, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Our Lord’s parable of the two debtors gives the same notion of sin. And St. Paul, speaking of man as under the covenant of works, says that “he is a debtor to do the whole law,” Now, as man, through the fall of Adam, is brought into a state of bankruptcy, and as the law of God cannot remit any part of its demand, the interposition of a surety becomes necessary,

and is implied in every promise of pardoning mercy. The penalty being paid, and the precept fulfilled, by Him who is called “Jehovah our righteousness,” “God can be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” He is “faithful and just in forgiving our sins, and in cleansing us from all unrighteousness.” The book is crossed, the debt cancelled, and the bankrupt sinner is restored to the possession of his alienated inheritance.

Sometimes sin is considered under the notion of moral filthiness, which the sinner has contracted, and which renders him unfit for the presence of God. Then the mode of removal is by abstersion. This is so common a representation of the state of man, and the allusions to a spiritual washing are so frequent throughout the Scriptures, that it is unnecessary to dwell upon it ; especially as it was fully brought before us when discoursing on the second verse of the Psalm. It will only be necessary therefore again to observe, that cleansing from the filthiness of sin supposes some means for the purification that is required, and that it is “the blood of Jesus Christ,” and that alone, which “cleanseth from all sin.”

In other passages sin is represented under the notion of something which separates the sinner from God ; as, for instance, when the Prophet Isaiah says, “Your iniquities have separated

between you and your God ; and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.”¹ This mean of separation is spoken of by the same prophet as a dark cloud which the mercy of God disperses. “ I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud thy sins : return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee.”² To this common phenomenon, the invention of a cloud between the sun and the earth, the expression of our text, perhaps, alludes. God is the Sun of the spiritual system. On the light of His countenance the comfort and well-being of His church, and of every member of His church, depends. Sin, unpardoned and unsubdued, is a dense cloud, through which no ray of consolation can penetrate ; and unless it be dispersed, it must terminate in “ the blackness of darkness for ever.”³ But there is provision made, in the economy of grace, for the dispersion of the darkest cloud. The light of a Divine righteousness is poured abroad ; the threatening cloud vanishes ; and the separating veil is removed. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus our Lord restores peace and communion between the sinner and his God. “ Return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee.”⁴ The Redeemer is Jehovah ; for the effluent light which dissipates the cloud, and the source

¹ Isaiah lix. 2.² Isaiah xlv. 23.³ Jude 13.⁴ Isaiah xlv. 22.

from which that light proceeds, are one in essence and operation.

Hence we find the Psalmist who, in our text, is heard, crying, “Blot out all mine iniquities,” in other portions of his Psalms, expressing the desire of his heart in differing terms of the same import—“Lift up the light of Thy countenance upon me.” Let us make the prayer our own! We have debts, (and who will say that the amount of his own is less than the ten thousand talents of the parable?)—We have debts to be blotted out of the book of Divine remembrance; we have pollution, both of soul and body, which must be washed away; and between us and our God there is a separating cloud of guilt, which must be dispersed. Let us plead our Surety’s payment of the debt; the cleansing virtue of His blood; and the mighty power of His rays to disperse the most dense and threatening cloud of vengeance.

We proceed to consider—

2. THE PENITENT PSALMIST’S PRAYER FOR THAT WHICH IS THE INSEPARABLE ATTENDANT OF A PARDONED STATE, VIZ. SANCTIFYING GRACE. “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*” Ver. 10.

The important points, which claim our attention in this latter verse of our text are,—The nature of the blessing that is implored,—and the agency from which it is expected to be derived.

The blessing is described by a two-fold phrase : It is "a clean heart, and a right spirit." These phrases are of much the same import. We may, however, make a remark or two on them separately and apart.

"A clean heart" is a heart purified from the love and power of sin. As attributed to man in the present world, it cannot mean the perfection of purity, or a deliverance from indwelling sin. This has been never found on earth, since the fall of human nature in the first Adam, but in the person of the second Adam, of whom, by way of exception, it is testified, that He "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."¹ "If *we* say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ;"² for "in many things we all offend."³ The utmost that a regenerate penitent can assert of himself, is that which St. Paul has stated respecting the feelings of his own heart, in the latter part of the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Let the penitent read it and be comforted. And let him remember that the blessing which he has not yet attained, and which he cannot, reasonably, hope to attain while in this hospital, the church below, but which is the object of his holy ambition and daily pursuit ; is promised and will be vouchsafed in that future state of the church, which consists of "saints made perfect."

¹ 1 Peter ii. 32.

² 1 John i. 8, &c.

³ James iii. 2.

But there is an intermediate state between that of nature and perfect holiness. It is a state of grace; a regenerate, penitent, believing state of soul—a state of the affections more remote from that of our natural state, than itself is from the state of glorified spirits. The distinction between nature and grace consists in a reversed current of the affections; that between grace and glory consists in the tenour of that current. In the state of regeneration here below, it is slow, obstructed, and unequal; in the future state, the current will flow back to its ocean in fulness of tide, without interruption, or inequality of motion. Now, it is the circulation of the vital fluid in a state of oppressive disease: then, in one of complete and eternal health. Blessed be God, who has restored us to life, and who is able and has promised to remove all the obstructions which that life now experiences in performing its functions, and to restore it to a capacity for the enjoyment of its proper element in His own presence and favour for ever and ever!

A clean heart, then, is a state of repentance towards God, and of faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. It is that very heart whose emotions are laid open to our view in this Psalm. The poverty of spirit, and purity of heart, which our Lord has characterised as essential to blessedness in the first and last of His beatitudes,¹ differ little from

¹ Let us notice the whole catalogue of features ascribed to the

each other. A penitent regard to the cross of Christ, as the medium of reconciliation and communion with God, is the essence of sanctification. It is the motive to gratitude, and the principle of all acceptable obedience. It is the life of God in the soul of fallen man, in its first communication, in its continuance and progress, and in the last actings of piety during the transition from grace to glory. He who by conviction of sin, wrought in him by the Spirit of grace, has seen and felt its evil, would no longer love and cherish it.—He who has discovered its malignity, as exhibited in the bitter sufferings of the Divine Saviour, must abhor it, and himself as infected with it.—He who has been taught to appreciate in any measure the value of communion with God as essential to the happiness of a rational mind, must long for an entire separation from that which clogs and interrupts that blessed communion. “He therefore who hath this hope in him,” a hope in Christ, “purifieth himself,” aims at self-purification, “even as God is pure.”¹

The purification of the heart from sin is the

regenerate soul :—1. Poverty of spirit.—2. Mourning for sin.—3. Meekness under afflictive dispensations of Divine Providence, and the painful lessons taught by the Spirit of conviction.—4. Hunger and thirst after pardon and reconciliation.—5. Mercy or pity to the souls and bodies of fellow sinners.—6. Purity of heart, &c.

¹ John iii. 3.

great intention of Divine benevolence in all its compassionate acts. This was the ultimate object proposed, in subservience to the glory of God and in connexion with it, by the incarnation, sufferings, and death of His only begotten Son. This is the object proposed in the economy of grace, and the process of the work wrought by the Spirit of Jesus on the redeemed soul. All the means of grace appointed and provided in the church; all the discipline of afflictive dispensation, whether outward or inward; all the permitted temptations of the wicked one, the groans of penitence and the difficult exercises of faith: all conduce to this ultimate purpose. This is the essence of heaven; for holiness and happiness are convertible terms: and the Christian pilgrim will find an abundant recompense for the toils and sufferings of the rough road which leads to it, in the vision of God and a capacity for the enjoyment of Him.

By “a right spirit” the Psalmist appears to have meant a fixed established frame of mind. This is the primary and general sense of the adjective he has used. He had given awful proof of the instability even of a regenerate state, when left of God. He felt the force of a caution since given by the pen of an Apostle, “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”¹

¹ 1 Cor. x. 12.

He had learned by painful, yea, bitter experience, that those who maintain their ground are "kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."¹ His prayer now was, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe."² He heard, as it were, the voice of mercy, saying, "Go, and sin no more."³ But he had learned the wisdom of converting precept into prayer, and of mixing faith in divine mercy and power with every duty he contemplated.

A consciousness of the necessity of Divine grace to the preservation of the life which it has communicated: to the resistance of temptation and to victory over it; to a daily walk with God, the Christian walk; to the continued exercise of faith in Christ; such a consciousness is one important ingredient in true repentance, and sure evidence of Divine teaching. The rottenness of many a death-bed repentance (as temporary alarm and remorse are often falsely characterised) is frequently discoverable by a total want of this conviction. "If I recover, I will lead a very different life from that which I have hitherto led," is language often used by persons in such circumstances. This intended change is proposed as atonement for past iniquity; and has no other foundation than the distress which sickness of body and the prospect of death have produced.

¹ 1 Peter i. 5.² Psalm cxix. 117.³ John v. 14.

A recovery generally manifests that the sorrow expressed is nothing more than "the sorrow of the world which worketh death." It is not that "Godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." It has none of the features of the latter. It is particularly defective with respect to that which David felt when he cried "Renew a right," or an established spirit "within me." Thy grace is necessary to "keep Thy servant" even "from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me."¹

The increase of this conviction of entire dependence on Divine influence is a growth in grace. The want of it is the occasion of many a bitter moment to sincere souls. This David and Peter painfully experienced; and both, by that experience, learned what we are slow to learn, "that it is not in man that walketh," by his own wisdom or strength, "to direct his steps aright."² We know that animal life and activity depend altogether on a communication with vital air; but we are not equally conscious that spiritual life, in its existence and all its actings, in the same manner depends on our communication with the Spirit of God, by whose influence the regenerate spirit "lives, and moves, and has its being."

This leads us to inquire more closely into the nature of that agency by which the penitent

¹ Psalm xix. 13.

² Jer. x. 23.

expects to obtain the blessing of "a clean heart and a right spirit," which in our text he implores. He asks the blessing from God, and he speaks of its production as an act of omnipotent power. The verb which he has used is one of three which are employed in Scripture to describe Divine agency in the world of nature. There are two other words which are used in relation to the form and shape given to pre-existent matter. But that which is here employed to designate a new spiritual creation, denotes the bringing into existence that which before had none. It is the word used in the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis. A clean heart has no existence in fallen human nature till God creates it. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation."¹ There are no elements left by the fall, out of which the new man in Christ can be formed. All its motives, principles, aims, and ends, are introduced by inspiration of God. The same important doctrine which is implied in the prayer of our text, is taught by the declaration of our Lord to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again," or from above; for, he adds, "That which is born of the flesh, is" altogether "flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit," and that alone, "is spirit;" on which assertions he again repeats the necessity of being "born again."²

¹ 2 Cor. v. 17.

² John iii. 3, 5, 6.

In order to enter fully into the import of the Psalmist's prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, &c." we must look back to the account which he had given, in the fifth verse, of his natural state, which we have endeavoured to illustrate and confirm by other scriptures and by matter of fact. He had said of himself, "Behold, I was shapen (or born) in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." He had confessed that his nature, his natural existence in all its principles and faculties, as well as in its actings, was altogether and exclusively sinful. On this he founds the earnest prayer of our text, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Nothing but almighty power could substitute a new nature for one so debased and defiled. The work was as much a work of omnipotence as that which brought the materials of our world into existence, and then so gave to them form and shape, beauty and usefulness, as that the Creator, beholding His work, could pronounce it "very good." "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God had before ordained that we should walk in them."¹

The views of the royal penitent bore no resemblance of Pelagianism or Semipelagianism. They were, in the strictest sense, orthodox, giving the glory to Him to whom it is exclusively due. He

¹ Ephesians ii. 10.

does not ask for aid and assistance in order that he might qualify himself for salvation. He entertained no idea of the power of nature to walk so as to please God. He derived no comfort from the notion of being restored by grace to an equilibrium between virtue and vice, sin and holiness, and then left to himself to make his election between them; and so, by the merit of condignity at least, to prepare himself for the favour of God and the enjoyment of Him. He implored the interference of *creating* energy, as essential to every emotion of true piety, and to every act of spiritual life.

Sanctification has been spoken of as the inseparable accompaniment of pardoning grace, and as consisting, in its first principles, of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Now since David was, as appears by the effusions of his heart in this Psalm, a penitent believer, why does he pray "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me?" Was not his heart already purified? Was not his spirit already set right with God? The answer to this inquiry is two-fold. In the first place a penitent is not always conscious of his own state. Indeed, the early symptoms of penitence are seldom appreciated fully as to their true character, and the evidence they afford of a gracious state of soul. The first sigh of godly sorrow is proof of a pardoned state. The first

glance towards the cross of Christ is justifying ; as the first effort to look to the Brazen Serpent brought life and salvation to the poisoned Israelite. But the penitent questions the nature and effects of his own feelings and acts. Repentance and faith are results of regenerating grace ; but the regenerate and penitent believer often hesitates, for a time at least, about the evidence they afford.

Moreover, sanctifying grace always produces a desire after further sanctification. Its language is, “ Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect : but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. I count not myself to have apprehended : but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”¹ A child can have no co-operation in its own conception ; but when born into the world, it becomes instinctively and actively employed in promoting its own growth. It affects maturity. So is it with the new-born soul. “ Then only shall I be satisfied, when I awake up with Thy likeness.”²

Let us, again, call to mind that pardon and holiness are inseparable benefits, both equally

¹ Phil. iii. 12, 13, 14.

² Psalm xvii. 15.

derived from the one source of all blessing. No sinner can obtain pardon but by faith in Christ; and faith is a sanctifying principle—it “worketh by love”¹—it purifies the heart.² Its necessary sanctifying effect has been indeed denied; but the denial has resulted from the blunder of confounding an assent of the understanding with the “faith that is of the operation of God.”³ Of the latter we read that “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;”⁴ and that those who obtain forgiveness of sins and the heavenly inheritance, “are sanctified by faith that is in Christ;”⁵ or by that faith of which Christ Jesus is the object. It is the parent of “hope and charity.” It “overcometh the world;” it is the instrumentality by which spiritual life is begun, carried on, and perfected; for “the just live by faith.”⁶

Let us further remark that the penitent desire after pardon is ever accompanied with the prayer of our text; “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” To this test the claim of a penitent state should always be brought. Are we sincere in praying, that God would so “cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Him, and worthily magnify His Holy Name?” Holiness is, in its seminal principle, love to God; and to magnify His Holy

¹ Gal. v. 6.² Acts xv. 9.³ Colos. ii. 12.⁴ Rom. x. 10.⁵ Acts xxvi. 18.⁶ Heb. x. 38.

Name is the aim of every work that is truly a good work.

They are fatally deceived, who substitute a reformation of conduct for the “new creation in Christ Jesus.” New hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, desires and aversions, are necessary to the proof of being in a state of grace. Morality is not religion,¹ and may exist independently of all Godliness. But Godliness cannot exist without morality. Oh ! let us remember the necessity of being “born of the Spirit” of God, in order to a participation of His favour and the enjoyment of His glory.

Desires after grace afford evidence of grace received. The consciousness of sickness is a proof of life. And He who has given life can also give health. The communication of the one is a pledge and assurance of the other. “He who hath begun the good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ.”

¹ See Bp. Horsley’s Primary Charge, and Mar. x. 21. Luke xviii. 22.

PSALM LI. 11.

Cast me not away from Thy presence ; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.

IN these two words the royal penitent deprecates the two greatest evils that can befall a sinner, viz. a separation from the source of happiness, and from the means of enjoying that happiness. Such a separation is the deplorable state of devils and damned souls. David expresses no uneasiness about the loss of his character, his kingdom, or his life, all of which he had justly forfeited. He manifests no anxiety to have the awful threatening reversed which Nathan by the authority of God had pronounced, respecting the calamities which were to follow each other, like wave after wave, during the whole course of his future days on earth. His solicitude is swallowed up by a subject of much higher importance, the favour of God and the salvation of his soul. “ Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.”

This anxious regard to the future prospects of the soul,—to God and to eternity,—in preference

to all other considerations, if not to their exclusion, is a feature of true repentance that is never absent. The penitent believer “looks not to the things which are seen, but to the things which are not seen,” knowing “that the things which are seen are temporal,” and that “the things which are not seen are eternal.”¹ The Apostle’s word by which he expresses this regard, shows the importance which is attached to unseen realities in the believer’s mind and heart. He makes them his scope and object. He aims at them, as the archer at his mark, to which his attention is exclusively directed. The faith which accompanies true repentance, and is its spring and source, “is the substance of things hoped for—the evidence of things not seen;” and that holy fear which is its constant companion, has for its objects sin as an offence against God, and the cause of forfeiting His favour, the loss of His presence, and everlasting banishment from Him. The sorrow of repentance is “*Godly* sorrow.”² Its motives are derived from God, and its aim and pursuit centre in Him.

We are not to infer from the words of our text that the royal penitent’s mind was a prey to despondency, or that he apprehended God would cast him away from His presence, and take His Holy Spirit from Him, while he deprecated these evils,

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

² 2 Cor. vii. 10.

(or rather this evil, for they are virtually one and the same, though differently expressed) as the greatest of all miseries. The form in which the text is expressed, proves that a lively hope of mercy was mingled with his bitterest regrets and sorrows. The verbs are here, as we remarked on a former verse, in the future tense, and may be rendered, “Thou wilt not cast me away from thy presence, and Thou wilt not take Thy Holy Spirit from me.” ‘I have, indeed, richly deserved this greatest of all evils; but “Thy mercy is high above the heavens, and Thy truth reacheth unto the clouds.”¹ “Thy ways are not our ways, nor Thy thoughts our thoughts; for as the heaven is high above the earth, so are Thy ways higher than our ways, and Thy thoughts than our thoughts.”² I am encouraged therefore to believe that, even to me, will Thy mercy be extended.’

Let us now consider the prayer, or rather the confidence of hope, which is contained in our text. It respects—

1. THE DIVINE FAVOUR.

2. THE AGENCY BY WHICH IT IS ENJOYED.

1. THE DIVINE FAVOUR is that, the loss of which is here deprecated, or, rather, of which the hope of recovery and enjoyment is here expressed. We shall inquire—What may be understood by the presence of God,—the loss of which

¹ Psalm lvii. 10; cviii. 4.

² Isaiah lv. 8.

the penitent sinner, on the one hand, deprecates as the greatest evil, and of which, on the other, he cherishes hope of recovery, as being the greatest good?

The presence of God, in Scripture language, imports three things:

1. The enjoyment of Divine ordinances as the appointed means of access to God. In these God has promised, and has, in all periods of His church, vouchsafed His peculiar presence with His people. In the tabernacle and temple of the Levitical worship, He often vouchsafed his presence visibly in the cloud of glory. In our ordinances, God is not less really though invisibly present with His worshipping people, with those who “worship Him in spirit, who rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”¹

A privation of those ordinances which are appointed to be means of grace, is a loss which is always deeply to be deplored. God may indeed visit, instruct, comfort, and sanctify the soul without them, when, in His gracious providence, He sees fit, by sickness or any other impediment to their enjoyment, to deprive His people of them. But His presence with the soul is not to be expected, when these inestimable privileges are despised or neglected, or when we voluntarily and without sufficient cause absent ourselves from

¹ Philippians iii. 3.

them. David found the loss to be a grievous one, when, in consequence of Absalom's rebellion, he was driven from Jerusalem and from the house of God. A separation from the temple-worship seems to have affected him more deeply than all his other privations. Alas ! how often do persons calling themselves Christians, in the choice of a residence for themselves and their families, even when that choice is uncontrolled by any imperative circumstances connected with it, neglect a consideration of that which is of all other considerations the most important, the opportunity of attending the means of grace ! Surely a real Christian must make this a primary object in all his arrangements. But how many prove their indifference to all spiritual advantages, by neglecting the means of grace when they are within their reach, by suffering trifles, which would not detain them from their worldly avocations, to detain them from the house of God ! Such persons may receive a reproof even from the lamentation of Cain, when he made it a chief subject of complaint respecting the sentence of banishment which had been pronounced on him, that he must be separated from the worship of God. "From Thy face (or presence) shall I be hid."¹ On the lips of such despisers of God the language of our text, "Cast me not away from Thy presence," would be that of vile hypocrisy.

¹ Genesis iv. 14.

But the expression, “the presence of God,” sometimes signifies a consciousness of Divine favour. God is not to be seen by the eye of sense ; but there is a consciousness of His favour to be experienced by the exercise of faith in the reconciling name of the adorable Saviour. It is the enjoyment of this which is the grand object of His people in their attendance on His worship. It is the hope of this, a hope founded on some experience of the blessing, which endears Divine ordinances to their hearts. It is the want of an acquaintance with this, that renders nominal Christians indifferent to them, and unbenefitted by them. This consciousness of Divine favour cannot be enjoyed while sin is cherished in the heart, or in an impenitent state of soul. This the royal penitent had found. Sin had separated between him and his God ; and his iniquities had hidden God from him. This he tacitly deploras in the words of our text, while he intreats and expresses his humble confidence that he should not be again deprived of some tokens of Divine lovingkindness.¹ A child of God, who has “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” who has experienced the peace and joy which result from His smile of approbation, must deprecate even the temporary loss of His presence, as the greatest evil which can befall him in this life. Very bitter

¹ Comp. Psalm lxxvii.

were the consequences to King Hezekiah, when “God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.”¹ This was what our Lord Jesus Christ chiefly deplored of all the direful ingredients of His bitter cup of penal sufferings. “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me!” He had never before lost a consciousness of the Divine presence—it was a trial of His faith entirely new. When this was restored to His soul, the bodily pains of the cross became tolerable. He cried, “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” The Sun of righteousness went down below the horizon for the appointed time without a cloud, to rise again in greater splendour for our justification.

O believer, dost thou resemble thy Lord in the estimate thy soul makes of the value to be attached to a consciousness of the favour of thy God? Dost thou appreciate it above every thing else? Hast thou tasted it, and dost thou cherish it as thy soul’s chief good? The desire after this inestimable blessing, and the value assigned to it, may be considered as another criterion of the existence and degree of true penitence.

But the expression of our text, “the presence of God,” sometimes denotes the beatific vision of God. “In Thy presence is fulness of joy;

¹ 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”¹ When Gabriel speaks of himself as standing “in the presence of God,”² he refers to this vision of His glory: and thus St. Paul identifies “the presence of the Lord” with “the glory of His power.”³ And again, the same Apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, characterises heaven by calling it “the presence of God.”⁴ And St. Jude also speaks of “the presence of His glory,”⁵ or His glorious presence. It is “the presence of God,” His unclouded favour, and the enjoyment of immediate communion with Him, that constitute, chiefly and essentially, the state of future happiness. Of this His people have a foretaste vouchsafed to them in a consciousness of His presence here below, a consciousness which sometimes rises into “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

Have we any consciousness of what heaven really is? David had a glimpse of it when he wrote the words of our text. Every penitent sinner has a relish for it. He may not feel satisfaction in his soul, arising from “the full assurance of hope;” but he is not looking forward to a Mahometan paradise, or to that which is altogether a *terra incognita*, an unknown country. He knows that “in God’s favour is

¹ Psa. xvi. 11.

² Luke i. 19.

³ 2 Thess. i. 9.

⁴ Heb. ix. 24.

⁵ Ver. 24.

life," and that communion with Him will be complete happiness. There is "an aching void" produced by Divine operation in his soul, which can only be filled by "the presence of God." Like a child, he may not know how the aliment he craves is to satisfy the pangs of hunger; but he is conscious, as it were instinctively, that there is that which will do it, and nothing besides can content him.

Let us now consider, further, the prayer, or the confidence of hope, to which the royal penitent gave utterance in this first branch of our text. "Cast me not away from Thy presence."

This prayer, or expression of faith and hope, (for all true prayer is the exercise of faith and hope in God's mercy through Christ) may be considered as relating to each of the several views we have taken of the presence of God.

"Cast me not away from Thy presence." 'I humbly trust that Thou wilt not deprive me of those means of grace, of which, in times that are past, I have often tasted the sweetness, and which I know to be the appointed channels of communication between Thyself and the soul. To be excluded by Thy displeasure from them I should feel to be a sore judgment, and the forerunner of final banishment from Thee, O my God. I have, indeed, justly forfeited the inestimable privilege of treading the courts of Thy house. I have, indeed, trampled under foot, as it were,

Thy blessed Son, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith I was sanctified, an unholy thing, and have done despite to the Spirit of Thy grace, by sinning wilfully after I had received the knowledge of the truth; and I know that there remaineth no other sacrifice for sin than that which is daily exhibited in type by the sacrifices of Thy altar. But Thou hast, difficult and rare as such a restoration is, renewed me again unto repentance. Oh let me not be deprived of those pledges of Thy favour, which bitter experience has now taught me so highly to value !'

The subsequent history of the royal penitent informs us that he was, in consequence of his sins, and as a remembrancer of them, separated from the house and worship of God, and from communication with His people in their public ordinances, during the time of Absalom's usurpation. But the exclusion was temporary. It increased, as we learn from several of his Psalms, his relish for those ordinances, so that his soul panted after them as the hunted hart for the water brook. The exclusion was, however, bitterly felt, as a just memento of his past offences, and as a grievous privation of present privilege. Such an exclusion, though temporary and made profitable, must always be severely felt by those who are alive to the value of the means of grace.

But that which David deprecates may be considered to relate, more particularly, to the

grace itself of which ordinances are the customary means and channels. ‘Let me not again forfeit and lose that consciousness of Thy “loving kindness, which is better than life itself.”’¹ Thou hast restored it to my soul, and I trust Thou wilt not again take it from me. Existence must be a curse and a series of miseries without it. Nothing can make up for its loss ; though Thy presence will abundantly compensate the loss of all outward comforts. All the glimmering light of star-like blessings in earthly benefits cannot counter-balance the absence of Thy light, O Thou Sun of the world of spirits ; but Thy light, vouchsafed to the soul, dims the sight as to all created good, and renders its feeble and uncertain presence unnecessary. “Thou wilt not cast me away from Thy presence :” but if the sweet consciousness of Thy favour be, for a season, withheld ; though heaviness may endure for a night, joy shall return in the morning, even “the light of Thy countenance.””

Such we may suppose to have been the devout feelings of David’s heart, when he expressed his anxious hope of Divine mercy in our text. And are not these the feelings of every penitent soul in every age ? What is conversion to God, but a conversion to those emotions towards God, in which He has a supreme regard ? What is

¹ Psalm lxiii. 3.

regeneration but an introduction to a new state of consciousness, in which God in Christ is "all in all?" What are all the actings of the Divine life, but expressions of the sensibilities kindled in a heart that has learned to seek its happiness from the favour of God, and in communion with Him?

But these sensibilities are only foretastes of that communion in which eternal felicity will be experienced by the children of God. They are the feeble aspirations of a child who, as yet, knows little of the value to be attached to a father's love, and of the enjoyment to be found in the communications of his favour. David, doubtless, looked forward to that which has been described by the just appellation of "the beatific vision." Such will be the vision of God, when the veil is withdrawn. "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known."¹ To "the inheritance of the saints in light"² every penitent soul is looking forward. It is the ultimate object of his desire, hope, and effort. This is the harvest, for which he is now sowing seed in tears of penitence and hope. And while, from some present feelings of delight in God, he is enabled to contrast the prospect of being for ever with Him, with the horrors

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

² Coloss. i. 12.

of exclusion from His presence, and “the blackness of darkness for ever,”¹ which must be the portion of every impenitent sinner; he is constrained afresh to admire and adore the riches of that grace, which has provided redemption for him, and has produced in his heart those emotions of desire and hope, which are the earnest and assurances of their own accomplishment.

We now proceed to inquire—

2. INTO THE AGENCY BY WHICH THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS NOW, AND WILL BE FOREVER ENJOYED BY THE PENITENT BELIEVER IN JESUS CHRIST. “*Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.*”

The two clauses of our text are closely connected, and the connexion is that of effect and cause, the effect being first mentioned, and then the agency by which it is produced. It is not the meritorious, but the efficient cause, that is here spoken of: not that which gives a claim to exemption from the tremendous doom of banishment from God; but that which gives a capacity for the enjoyment of his presence. “Thou wilt not cast me away from Thy presence; and (therefore) Thou wilt not take Thy Holy Spirit from me.”

‘Send me not away from Thee;
Go not Thou away from me.’

¹ Jude 13.

The influence of the Spirit of God is spoken of in our text as being essentially requisite to the enjoyment of His presence, both as His regenerating power creates the capability for that enjoyment, and also as it is His testimony to the atonement which furnishes the hope and assurance of peace made by the blood of the cross. "All holy desire," heavenly hope, and spiritual consolation, depend on His communications. Hence in the triform apostolic blessing, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" in redemption, "and the love of God" which provided it, and to the enjoyment of which redemption entitles the believer, is followed by "the communion of the Holy Ghost." He is "the author and giver of spiritual life." It is produced by and is entirely dependent on His influence, as the life of the body is produced and maintained by a communication with vital air, the scriptural emblem of His agency. He quickens, enlightens, sanctifies, and comforts the before torpid soul, capacitating it for the reception of those glimpses of the Divine favour which are vouchsafed on earth, and for the fullness of this blessing in a future state. His influence is the element in which saints made perfect live, and by which they enjoy the felicity of heaven. It is, itself, that heavenly felicity.

We may conceive, then, the Psalmist as saying in this latter clause of the text. 'O God, in order that I may enjoy Thy presence, in its first

fruits now and in its fulness hereafter, I know that the continued grace of Thine own Spirit is indispensably necessary. Bitter experience has taught me the unavoidable result of grieving and quenching His sacred influence.¹ I now beseech Thee that, as Thou hast renewed in my soul a consciousness of Thy presence, those influences which are essential to its enjoyment may be continued to me, that I may live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit, and so have fellowship with Thee as my Father, through the mediation of Thy Son Jesus Christ, whose "blood cleanseth from all sin."² Let His witness in my heart, that I am Thy child, be always legible. Oh, may His grace, as the spirit of adoption, enable me at all times to "cry Abba, Father." May His work within ever prove the earnest of the future inheritance, and be the first fruits of the glory to be revealed.'

Let us remark the mode of expression which the royal penitent has adopted in this clause of our text—"Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." It evidently implies that he considered himself as a partaker of His influence. Indeed, he could not, without absurdity doubt it. The sensibilities to which he had given utterance in the former part of the Psalm, afforded sufficient evidence of the agency by which they had been produced.

¹ Eph. iv. 30. 1 Thess. v. 19.

² 1 John i. 7.

Such streams could only proceed from a Divine source. O let every penitent acknowledge what God hath done, and make it a plea for obtaining more grace. Let him not rob Him, who is the Author of all true repentance, of the glory that is due to His name. As quickened to newness of life, to emotions before unknown, let him beware of attributing to nature what grace only can effect. These exhortations appear to be justified by the frequent proneness of the awakened mind, in its fears and jealousies respecting its own state, to silence the evidence of regenerating grace which its own sensibilities afford. Like the perverted imagination in some cases of lunacy, it rejects the nourishment after which it hungers, for fear of the danger of poison which it associates with the use of that nourishment. Let not the penitent limit the boundless mercy of God in Christ; but let him obey the Divine command, to "open his mouth widely that God may fill it."¹

But there may, perhaps, be more implied in the Psalmist's mode of expression, than a persuasion that his present state of heart was produced by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, it implies a persuasion that, even in the depths of his fall, he had been indebted to this grace. Without it he would have sinned past all recovery, and have been, like Ahithophel and Judas,

¹ Psalm lxxxi. 10.

a self-destroying reprobate. The grace of regeneration may be checked, suppressed, and buried for a time; but it cannot be extinguished. Its seed which is implanted in the soul, by the instrumentality of that word which liveth and abideth for ever, is "incorruptible seed."¹ Regeneration is indissolubly linked with eternal life.

But though a child of God is begotten of incorruptible seed, he may forfeit all the comforts resulting from it, and destroy all the evidence, to himself, of his being born of God. He may have to complain of broken bones, and even fear the loss of life itself. He may compass himself about with many sorrows for the remainder of his days on earth, as David did; and go down to his grave, though freed from the sting of damning guilt, yet with the barbed arrow of bitter regret fixed in his heart, and irremovable from it.

We have learned, then, what it was that David so earnestly deprecated in saying, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." He dreaded being left for a moment without that Divine energy which he felt within himself, and to which he attributed all the spiritual sensibility which had been reproduced in his soul. He contemplated the Holy Spirit of God as the author of all spiritual life, and of sanctifying grace. He felt the necessity of His continued influence to his perse-

¹ 1 Peter i. 23.

verance in the path of duty, and his enjoyment of God's presence.

How may I know if my own heart be a partaker of this influence? To bring ourselves to a just criterion on this momentous point is the proper application of our subject. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."¹ "But if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."² How then is the awful alternative to be safely decided? Let us apply ourselves to the inquiry with a due sense of the consequences which attend it. Are those convictions and affections which are described in this model of true repentance, and on which David rested the evidence of his acceptance with God, found in our own hearts? Is the atonement of the Lamb of God our only basis of hope? Is the favour of God become essential to our happiness; and do we, experimentally, know that Divine influence is essential to spiritual life?

Let us never lose sight of the epithet by which the Spirit of God is characterised in our text, and in many other parts of scripture. He is the HOLY Spirit, and is so called, not so much with respect to His own character, as to the character and effects of His influence on the fallen heart of man. He "sanctifieth all the elect people of God." While mankind at large are the subjects

¹ Romans viii. 14.

² Romans viii. 9.

of redemption, those only who are “sanctified” are the subjects of His influence. Hatred of sin, and love to God, which are the seminal principles of holiness, are constant results, and the only safe evidences, of the Spirit’s regenerating grace.—Regeneration, the thing signified by the initiatory rite of baptism, is “a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness ; for being by nature born in sin, and children of wrath, we are thereby,” by the regenerating power of God, “made the children of grace.”

PSALM LI. 12, 13.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit : Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.

DIVINE faith, though it is the legitimate parent of humility, is also the parent of holy boldness. While the redeemed sinner, in whose heart the grace of faith is operative, freely acknowledges that he deserves nothing but hell, yet can he be satisfied with nothing short of the hope of heaven. The same faith which, working by love, causes him to tremble at the thought of banishment from the presence of God, causes him also to aspire, with a self-renouncing confidence in the grace of Christ, to a restoration of communion with God, whose favour he has been taught to consider as the only fountain of blessedness. He understands and adopts the Apostle's paradox, "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

There is no inconsistency in this view of Christian experience. The deepest humility is perfectly

compatible with the cultivation of holy boldness in the exercise of faith, and with the largest expectations at the throne of mercy. This consistency of feelings, which are apparently paradoxical and in seeming opposition to each other, arises out of the twofold object on which the believer's eye is fixed. On the one hand, he contemplates his own state, character, and conduct, in contrast with the holiness and majesty of God,—and abhors himself. On the other, he contemplates the unfathomable compassion of God, the infinite merit of his Saviour's sufferings, and the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel, as founded on Divine compassion and the merit of his Saviour; and thus his fears are dissipated, and expectations of eternal blessing, beyond all that he can ask or think, are kindled and cherished in his bosom.

These remarks have been occasioned by the progressive character of David's petitions. He begins by imploring mercy for the pardon of his sins. He proceeds to ask for a new heart and a right spirit. He then ventures to solicit a restoration and continuance of God's presence with his soul—and now, in the words of our text, for a restoration of joy in the experience of salvation, and of usefulness in the church. We shall have to consider, in the words before us,

1. THE PENITENT PSALMIST'S PETITION WHICH THEY CONTAIN, AND WHICH IS EN-

FORCED BY A MOST IMPORTANT ARGUMENT.
Ver. 12.

2. HIS ANTICIPATION OF THE RESULT WHICH
WOULD FOLLOW A FAVOURABLE ANSWER TO
HIS PRAYER. Ver. 13.

There are some scriptural terms which can scarcely be too often explained and applied. Their intrinsic importance, and the tendency of the human heart to forget them, prove the necessity of a frequent recurrence to them. Such a term occurs in our text. It is the term "salvation." Let us afresh advert to its awful import—to that which makes it necessary for every human being—to the particulars of which it consists—to the source from which only it can be derived—and to its everlasting consequences to those who are partakers of it. Bearing in mind these considerations, as connected with the term "salvation," we shall not be surprised at the Philippian jailor's question, "What must I do to be saved?" nor shall we find fault with the scriptures for dwelling so largely on the subject. We shall not blame the compilers of our Liturgy for putting into our lips so frequently the language of prayer for obtaining it; nor will a public instructor be condemned for continually calling the attention of his hearers to it with all the powers of persuasion which he can employ.

The necessity of salvation arises out of the fallen and lost condition of the whole race of man.

“The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” To deny this necessity would be equivalent to a denial of any necessity for the incarnation, sufferings, and death of Him whom God sent into the world to save sinners. It would involve a charge of folly against God Himself—a renunciation of all interest in Christ—a rejection of Him as our atoning Saviour. Salvation is a deliverance from the guilt, the power, and the punishment of sin; and consequently it includes pardon, holiness, and everlasting life. Holiness, produced by the regenerating influence of God’s Holy Spirit, is a branch of salvation, and not its procuring cause. It is, indeed, that which qualifies the soul for future happiness; but it is not the meritorious ground on which it is bestowed. It is itself as much a gift of grace, as is the gift of righteousness, in the train of which it always follows.

Every penitent therefore, like the Psalmist in our text, attributes salvation, in all the views which can be taken of the word, to God, and to God alone. He is its author,—it is *His* salvation. His wisdom suggested and contrived the plan by which it is effected; and His power carried that plan into execution. Man could in no sense be his own Saviour; and now that a method of salvation is provided, he has no desire after obtaining it, until that desire is kindled in his soul by the Spirit of God. He is “dead in trespasses and

sins," till the awakening voice of Divine compassion reaches his ear and penetrates his soul. Moreover, the knowledge of this salvation, when the want of it is felt, must be derived from Divine inspiration; for though it is revealed in Scripture, the application of that which is there revealed requires a fresh interposition of Divine compassion in every individual instance of its efficacy. "Salvation is," therefore, in all its ramifications, "of the Lord."¹ It is "God" who "worketh in us, to will and to do, of His good pleasure."² "All" these "things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us," or *put in us*,³ "the word of reconciliation."⁴ The causality, the instrumentality, and the efficiency, are equally and altogether HIS. With the utmost propriety, therefore, does the penitent in our text ascribe salvation to God, as being exclusively its Author.

Salvation and the joy of salvation are not always contemporaneous; the latter does not always accompany the former in present experience, though ultimately, as cause and effect, they must be united. Though they are not parallel lines, yet

¹ Psalm lii. 8.

² Philip. ii. 13.

³ Marg. Reading.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 18, &c.

they are converging lines which must meet at last, however gradual be the tendency towards each other. These blessings were not contemporaneous in the experience of the Psalmist ; otherwise, as his very prayers prove that he was in a state of salvation, there would have been no need of praying for the joys thereof. They differ as life and health, as heirship, and the capacity and means of knowing it. A sick man may be under a process of recovery, and yet be in doubt concerning the restoration of his health. Pain and weakness may cause him to hesitate. A child may be an heir to an estate or a kingdom, and yet derive no joy from the prospect of his future inheritance. He may be unable to trace his genealogy, or to read his title deeds and the testament of his father ; or, with a capacity of reading them, he may be unable to understand their import, and his guardian may for a time deem it right to suffer him to remain in ignorance. But his ignorance does not affect the validity of his title. "The joy of God's salvation" for which the penitent prays, is the comfort of knowing our interest in it—a consciousness of pardon and peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is what St. Paul designates "the assurance of hope." Every penitent is in a state of salvation, and has, in the very gift of repentance itself, "the earnest of the Spirit in his heart." But every penitent does not know that he is a partaker of the inestimable benefit. Per-

sonal assurance of salvation is not necessarily connected with faith. They are not essentially the same. Every believer, *might*, indeed, infer, from the effect produced in his heart by the Spirit of God, his own safety and privileges; but many who truly believe, are “unskilful in the word of righteousness,”¹ and fail of drawing the conclusion from scriptural premises, which they would be justified in drawing. They remain “babes in Christ” for a longer or shorter period.

The perpetuity of faith in the regenerate soul is a scriptural doctrine which must be maintained; but the perpetuity of assurance cannot be maintained consistently with scripture, and with the experience of the children of God. Their comforts ebb and flow. The essence of assurance is communion with God, and intervening clouds between Him and the soul, induced by the believer’s own unfaithfulness, or by the gracious dispensations of infinite wisdom and goodness, may weaken or suspend it. And this variation in experience proves the distinction which has been mentioned between faith and the assurance of hope. The former is essential to safety, and the latter to comfort. The latter may have been enjoyed, and yet be again and again interrupted; but the former, which is the instrument of interest in the promises, can never be extinguished.

¹ Hebrews v. 13.

But though all penitent believers are not joyful believers, yet all penitent believers are anxious to obtain "the joy of God's salvation." The awakened mind cannot find repose on the wave of uncertainty. The believer knows the value of his soul, the danger to which by sin it is exposed, the impossibility of salvation without an interest in Christ, and the difficulty of believing: he appreciates duly the alternatives of a state of guilt and pardon in this life, and of hell and heaven in the world to come. He must therefore be anxious to arrive at a certainty on the momentous question, Am I a Christian in name only, or in deed and in truth? He uses the means which are prescribed for attaining this certainty, of which the fervent use of such a prayer as that which is under our consideration, may be esteemed the chief.

Let this then be made the criterion of a penitent and a safe state;—not, can I say, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He will keep what I have committed to Him against that day;"¹ but, will nothing satisfy me without this "joy of God's salvation?" Is the attainment of it that which my soul longs for?—Is it my daily aim, my supreme desire?

We must remark the language which the Psalmist has used in praying for this blessing. He says, "*Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation.*"

¹ 2 Tim. i. 12.

It was not an entirely new blessing, with the consciousness of which he had previously been unacquainted. He had before "tasted that the Lord is gracious."² But he had forfeited the privilege, and had, by the indulgence of sin, disqualified himself for its enjoyment. His re-awakened conscience now felt the immensity of his loss, and that nothing could restore peace to his heart but the re-communication of the inward witness of Divine favour. He had learned by bitter experience that a state of allowed sin and of "joy in the Holy Ghost" are incompatible the one with the other. He felt the truth of what St. John has asserted that "if we say we have fellowship with God and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth."² But he had also learned, and in this Psalm puts the blessed lesson in practice, that "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just in forgiving sin and in cleansing from all unrighteousness."³

It is evident from the Psalmist's prayer, that God only can comfort those whom He has wounded. The keen sense of remorse occasioned by flagrant transgression recently committed may, indeed, gradually wear away, or be entirely removed, by the lapse of time, from a heart that has been disquieted but not converted. But such relief is not "the joy of God's salvation." Recourse may be had to a train of reasoning on the placability of

¹ 1 Peter ii. 3.

² 1 John i. 6.

³ 1 John i. 9.

the Divine character, or even to the scriptures themselves in the revelation of an all-sufficient atonement made by the death of a Divine Mediator; but, till the Spirit of God vouchsafes His witness to the conscience, the powers of unassisted reason, whether arguing from general principles, or even from the clear light of the Gospel, must fail of satisfying a truly awakened mind. It must anxiously and habitually be engaged, as David's was, in seeking the promised influence of the one Comforter, by saying, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation," till the boon be granted by Him whose prerogative it is to grant it.

O let the backslider, whether his declension from God has been confined to the state of his heart, or, like the Psalmist's, has awfully shown itself in overt acts of sin, meditate on this sweet prayer, and appropriate it to his own use. Does he feel that he has forfeited and lost that which was once his chief treasure and delight? Is he conscious that a sense of the favour of his God is essential to the peace and happiness of his soul? Does he go forward in the path of his pilgrimage, bemoaning his folly, dissatisfied with himself? Do his tears moisten his path and his bed? Let him adopt the Psalmist's prayer. "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation;" and let him remember that the suit of David succeeded, as have the prayers of thousands who have since gone to the throne of grace in a similar state of mind.

Who is there among the conscious children of God, to whose use this prayer is not adapted? Do not all experience interruptions, or, at least, abatements of that intercourse with a reconciled God, which it is the privilege and aim of His people to maintain in its fullest vigour of enjoyment? Does a day pass on, in which a renewal of this application to the throne of mercy is found unnecessary by those, whose constant employment it is to watch over their own hearts, and to humble themselves before God on account of their omissions of duty and commissions of sin?

We proceed now to notice the important consideration which the Psalmist states for the purpose of enforcing his earnest petition to be restored to “the joy of God’s salvation.” In our version the clause appears as a new petition:—“And uphold me *with Thy* free Spirit.” But it will be observed that, in order to give the original words this meaning, the translators have been obliged to supply both a preposition and a pronoun, neither of which, as is denoted by their being printed in italic letters, is to be found in the Hebrew text; and to change the tense of the verb, which is the future. Literally the rendering should be (the order of the words requires it) “the spirit of liberty, or, a free spirit, shall uphold me.” If the term subjoined to the word “spirit,” be rendered as an adjective, its feminine termination will furnish an additional argument to prove that

the word “spirit,” be rendered as an adjective, its feminine termination will furnish an additional argument to prove that the word “spirit” does not here designate the Holy Ghost, but the effect of His influence in the heart of a comforted sinner.

I understand, then, the Psalmist to have said, “Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation,” “and a free spirit,” that is, the blessing for which he had before prayed, viz. “the joy of Thy salvation,” “shall uphold me,”—shall preserve me from again departing from Thee and falling into sin, as I have already most awfully done.

Let us inquire what this “free spirit,” or this “spirit of liberty,” of which our text speaks, may import. What is it but that liberty in which St. Paul exhorted the Galatians to stand fast,—the liberty “wherewith Christ makes” His people “free,”¹ and which is contrasted “with the yoke of bondage?” It is “the spirit of adoption” communicated to the heart, the language of which is “Abba, Father.”² It is the consciousness of that freedom from condemnation, which the same Apostle tells the Romans belongs “to them who are in Christ Jesus, and who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.”³ It is “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” setting the mind “free from the law of sin and death.”⁴ It is the effect of the Spirit’s “witness with our

¹ Gal. v. 1.² Rom. viii. 15.³ Ib. 1.⁴ Ib. 2.

spirits, that we are the children of God.”¹ It is the privilege of all penitent believers, though not enjoyed by all; it can be enjoyed by none but penitent believers, though those who are not such too often prefer a claim to it.

This “free spirit” or consciousness of liberty in the soul, which “casts out the fear that hath torment,”² must depend on right views of the Gospel-plan of salvation. In order to its production and establishment, that plan must be understood in its different bearings and relations. The state of man by nature as guilty, polluted, helpless, and hopeless, must be felt; and the necessity of Divine interposition, free and complete in all its parts, must be felt also. Indeed the latter of these convictions implies the former. The scriptural doctrine of atonement by the blood of the Divine Surety, fully adequate in itself as a satisfaction to the justice of God in the penal sanction of His righteous law, must be perceived and admitted, so as to preclude any necessity for addition to it from the sufferings or obedience of the sinner himself; and the honour given to the preceptive branch of that law by the righteousness of the Divine Surety, must also be so perceived and admitted as to preclude any necessity for addition by personal obedience, for the purpose of vindicating the Lawgiver in the sinner’s justification

¹ Rom. viii. 16.

² 1 John iv. 18.

in His sight. “Works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of His Spirit,” must be acknowledged to “have the nature of sin,” and to be therefore altogether destitute of those qualities which are alone “pleasant to God;” and works done after the justifying grace of Christ and the regenerating inspiration of His Spirit, must be acknowledged to be, as performed by one, who, although regenerate, is still in an imperfect and sinful state, wholly unsuited to the office of aiding in the work of justification, were any thing required to be conjoined with the infinitely meritorious work of the Redeemer for that purpose. In short, in order to enjoy this spirit of liberty, or “the joy of God’s salvation,” the penitent must altogether renounce his own righteousness, and be made willing to be saved as a sinner through that salvation which has been procured for him. He must unite with St. Paul in his disclaimer, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

But to this state of mind the awakened sinner cannot bring himself. He cannot effectually counteract the pride of his own heart, that reluctance which the Apostle charged on the Jews as their great sin, and which is common to all,—a reluctance to “submit to the righteousness of God,” or, to seek salvation in the way of His

¹ Galatians vi. 14.

appointment, through faith in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The reduction of a naturally self-righteous heart to this posture of self-renunciation is, indeed, the work of God. It is a work which is often slow in its progress, as it was in the case of Job, and of some of St. Paul's converts: and to this, perhaps, it is chiefly to be attributed, that many, of whose sincerity and safety there can be no doubt, are so long before they arrive at "the liberty with which Christ makes free" all those who fully embrace the truth which is in Him. They hesitate on the subject of their right to "lay hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel," though they admit that the provision made for that delightful hope is full and satisfactory. But "Am I interested in it," is a question which they are unable to resolve to the satisfaction of their own minds. It is admitted that bodily temperament may have much to do with the degree of comfort derived from the Gospel by its professors. Generally speaking, however, the cause which has been just assigned, is that which is prevalent in deferring and abridging that "joy and peace in believing,"¹ which is the acknowledged privilege of every true Christian.

The effect which is ascribed to this liberty of soul in the life and walk of a Christian, is one of the highest importance. That effect is the esta-

¹ Romans xv. 13.

blishment of the heart in the profession of Godliness, and a corresponding course of conduct. The devout reasoning of the Psalmist in our text may remind us of the motive addressed by Nehemiah to the self-convicted Jews when, on hearing the law of God read to them, they were oppressed by a consciousness of their own guilt. Nehemiah said to them, “Be not sorry,” let not a sense of your sins overwhelm you; “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”¹ God pardons sin—you must seek forgiveness from Him; and a sense of His pardoning mercy will prove the best preparation for future obedience to His will.

If the “service” of God be indeed “perfect freedom,”² the delight found in it must be connected with the state of the heart towards Him; it must arise from a consciousness of reconciliation with Him. Without this, the service of God, (if a reluctant performance of external duty may be so called) must be a matter of perfect indifference, or of perfect drudgery. His favour must be enjoyed, or, at least, sought after as the soul’s chief good, in order that any act of duty may become a source of pleasure to the mind. It is a question to which many who are called Christians must, if it be honestly answered, give an awful negative, ‘Did I ever endeavour to perform a single act, with an unequivocal desire of

¹ Neh. viii. 10.

² The second Collect in the Morning Service.

pleasing God, and influenced by gratitude for His mercy to me?’

The line of argument which our text adopts, leads us more particularly to consider the effect of the spirit of liberty from that bondage, which the Apostle justly calls a yoke on the neck of an unhumbled sinner, as it is influential on the fidelity of the believer and on his perseverance in the ways of God. The argument of the Psalmist stands in direct opposition to the blasphemous libel of those objectors to the grace of God, who stigmatise it as conducive to licentiousness of heart and life. If any man be found who says, “Let us continue in sin that grace may abound;”¹—we answer with the Apostle, “God forbid! how shall we who are dead to sin, live any longer therein!” Are there those “who turn the grace of God,” that is, the doctrine of His grace, into lasciviousness? We deny not that there are: but we say, that their hearts are strangers to its legitimate influence. The joy to which they pretend, if they pretend to spiritual joy, is not “the joy of the Lord”—the “liberty” of which they boast is not the liberty of His children. They awfully deceive themselves. We say with St. John, “They have gone out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they

¹ Romans vi. 1.

went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us.”¹ For “Whosoever abideth in Christ, sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him neither known Him.”² “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”³

But though men may say that “they know God, and in works deny Him,”⁴ the awful fact in no degree weakens the assertion of our Lord, that it is “life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.”⁵ To know God, as He is revealed in His Son, is to experience “the joy of His salvation;” and this experience “is life eternal,” produced by the regenerating Spirit of God, maintained by His influence, and perfected in the beatific vision. On the effect produced by “a lively hope” of the heavenly “inheritance,” founded exclusively on the “abundant mercy” of God, let the former part of the first chapter of St. Peter’s first general epistle be consulted. What, it may be asked, sustained the martyrs of former ages in all their sufferings? It was “the joy of God’s salvation.” What was it that wrought effectually in the worthies of all ages, whose names and achievements are recorded in the eleventh chapter of the

¹ 1 John ii. 19.² Chap. iii. 6.³ Verse 10.⁴ Tit. i. 16.⁵ John xvii. 1.

epistle to the Hebrews? The Apostle tells us it was "faith:" and what is the immediate object of saving faith but reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ our Saviour? It is this faith which still "purifies the heart," and which "works by love." And the more lively and operative its existence in the soul, in embracing the free and full salvation proposed in the Gospel, the more manifest will its effects be, in opposition to sin, and in promoting holiness both of heart and life.

Let the penitent believer then pray continually for "the joy of God's salvation," with the expectation that the spirit of Christian liberty which he implores will be his best preservative from the corruption of his own evil heart, from the temptations of Satan, and from the allurements of the world. That corruption can be subdued only by faith—"The fiery darts of the Wicked One" can be "quenched" only by "the shield of faith,"¹ And "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even faith."² And let it be ever kept in mind that it is the province of faith to look perpetually to the once crucified but now risen and ascended Saviour as being, exclusively and inclusively, the source and channel of salvation; and to eternal life, consisting in the favour and enjoyment of God, as salvation itself in the full and final import of that important term.

¹ Eph. vi. 16.

² 1 John v. 4.

Should any doubt remain on the mind of the penitent believer, whether it be his duty and privilege to pray for and to cultivate this spirit of liberty, let him consider the end for which Christ came into the world, as it is stated by St. Paul ;—" God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them who, as being born of woman, are sinners, and, as being "under the law," were condemned by it: "that we might receive the adoption of sons."¹ And the Apostle adds, on a supposition that those to whom he addressed himself were participants of this adoption, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father.'"² Let him remember that in the lovely train of graces, which are spoken of as the fruits of the Spirit, "love, joy, and peace,"³ stand foremost: these are, as it were, the leaders of the holy band. They must have the precedence and the pre-eminence. The rest follow in due order. The faith which occurs among them is not the act which instrumentally justifies; but it is that fidelity to Him who is the Author of justification, which "love" to His name, the "joy" of His salvation, and the "peace" which His atonement creates in the conscience, concur to ensure.

Before we pass on to the remainder of our

¹ Gal. iv. 4, 5.

² Verse 6.

³ Gal. v. 22.

text, let us recollect that the doctrine which has been maintained is continually recognised by our church in the blessing pronounced at the close of our service. “*The peace of God*, which passeth all understanding, *keep* your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is hardly necessary to observe that the blessing must be enjoyed, in order that it may produce the effects which are ascribed to it. But the doctrine of the benediction of our church has higher authority than that of fallible synods or councils, or of human forms by them appointed; for this part of the ministerial benediction is taken from the assurance given by St. Paul to his Philippian converts—“*The peace of God*, which passeth all understanding, *shall keep* your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” If “the peace of God” be the means of keeping the heart and mind, it must also be the means of keeping the life in subordination and delightful obedience to all the will of God.

We now proceed to consider—

2. THE PENITENT PSALMIST’S ANTICIPATION OF THE RESULT WHICH WOULD FOLLOW A FAVOURABLE ANSWER TO HIS PRAYER, “Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and the free spirit shall uphold me. *Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.*” Verse 13.

The latter of these verses, which we are now

to consider, may relate either to a resolution of the Psalmist's soul, according to our authorised version ; or it may import his anticipation of the result which would follow a favourable answer to his prayer. This difference will arise from a change of the sign of the future tense. Then *shall* I be the means of teaching transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee. The latter appears to me the more eligible view of his meaning.

A true penitent must be deeply concerned about the glory of God his Saviour, and the salvation of the souls of others. It is impossible for a man to feel the value of his own soul, its guilt and danger, without sympathising with his fellow sufferers, his shipmates in the foundered vessel of human nature, and without being solicitous to become instrumental in their rescue from the raging deep. It is impossible for a man to become conscious of his obligations to the redeeming love of God, without being anxious to promote His glory in that way by which He has chosen to glorify His own name, even by the salvation of lost sinners. With a view to promote these objects of his sincere and supreme desire, the penitent willingly sacrifices his own character, publishes his own guilt, and exhibits himself as a pattern of sovereign grace. Of this we have an instance in the Psalm we are reviewing ; and we have another in the case of Saul of Tarsus. " I

was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious ; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief ; and the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ; of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.”¹ Such views of ourselves, and such anticipations of the effect of mercy received by us, are genuine fruits of a truly penitent heart.

“ Transgressors ” — “ sinners ” — These are the characters of fallen man ; and he who would instruct others, must be conscious that these characters belong to himself. By this consciousness he is qualified to sympathize with the awakened soul, and to mourn over those who remain “ dead in trespasses and sins ; ” to persevere in his efforts, and to carry the wants both of the careless and the seeker to the throne of mercy. The recollection, “ Such was I myself,” will inspire compassion, long-suffering, and zealous exertion. It will banish despair, and keep alive the hope of success.

¹ 1 Tim. i. 13, &c.

And here we may remark the wisdom and goodness of God, in appointing men of like passions with others to be the heralds of His mercy, rather than angels. The latter could not appeal to personal experience as the former may and do. The latter could not exhibit themselves as illustrative and encouraging patterns of mercy.

The “ways” of God in which the penitent Psalmist hoped to be the instrument of instructing his fellow sinners, may be considered as twofold—They may regard His method of dealing with man according to the two distinct and opposed dispensations which He has revealed. These are “the law of works,” and “the law of faith.”¹ The children of the first Adam, irrespectively of an interest in the second Adam through faith in His name, will be dealt with as transgressors of the law of the first dispensation. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”² This is necessary to be known with a view to a preparation for believing in Christ: for “by the law is the knowledge of sin.”³ But that which is principally intended, when the ways of God are spoken of, is, doubtless, the Gospel of His grace, or His method of saving sinners by Jesus Christ. The provision of atonement and righteousness for the justification of the ungodly, and the communication of Divine influence for awakening, humbling, sanctifying,

¹ Rom. iii. 27.

² Ezek. xviii. 4.

³ Rom. iii. 20.

and preserving the fallen soul, are the ways of God, in which the penitent Psalmist devoutly hoped to be the instrument of instructing the souls of his fellow sinners. He could tell them of the aboundings of Divine grace to the chief of sinners. He could warn them of the evil of sin, and of the danger of continuing under its guilt and power. He could, with confidence of success attending obedience to the invitation, “ beseech them, in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled unto God.”

Should it be asked, Whether the anticipation of the son of Jesse has been realised ? We may answer that it has beyond all his own expectations. By the publication of his Psalms, and especially of that which is the subject of these lectures ; by the pattern of mercy which his history affords ; by his testimony in the hour of death,¹ as well as in the day of life ; he has been indeed a blessing to the church of God. By his writings and example, through successive generations for almost three thousand years, the careless have been awakened, the mourners comforted, the ignorant instructed, the weak strengthened, and believers enlivened with a devotion similar to his own. His glowing predictions have confirmed the past facts of Christianity, and are now affording evidence of the glorious events which

¹ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

are still future. It may truly be said that in his Psalms, “ he being dead, yet speaketh.”

“ Sinners shall be converted!” How blessed to be instrumental in promoting such a benefit! The conversion of a soul, how vast and delightful an object of anticipation! In a comparison, how poor all the achievements of heroes and legislators! What are all the monuments of antiquity compared with a monument of the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord? They shall perish, but this shall endure for ever.

Happy penitent, who could anticipate such a result of his holy sorrows—who could look forward to such an issue of the dealings of God with his own soul—who could anticipate the union of thousands with himself in the everlasting song of praise to redeeming love!

It may be observed that David does not say, ‘ I *will* convert sinners unto Thee.’ His own case had proved that conversion is the work of God. But he says, the effect will follow, according to Divine promise, in the use of appointed means. “ Sinners shall be converted unto Thee.” ‘ Such will be the result of the dispensation of Thy mercy towards myself.’

Let us seriously review the further criteria of true penitance which our text affords. Are we seeking for “ the joy of God’s salvation?” Are we conscious that nothing short of this will satisfy us? Are we looking to it as connected with the

practice of piety, as influential on devotedness of heart and life to the service of God ? Is it our great aim to recommend the Gospel of Christ, both by word and deed, to our fellow sinners, that they also may taste “the joy of God’s salvation ?”

PSALM LI. 14.

*Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou
God of my salvation, and my tongue shall
sing aloud of Thy righteousness.*

How blessed is that cardinal doctrine of Divine Revelation, that “the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin!”¹ It has allsufficient virtue for this purpose. It was shed, and has been accepted by Him who appointed it, for this end. It is the blood of Him, who is “God manifest in the flesh,”² who, being Himself without sin, “was made sin,” or a sin-offering, “for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”³ What multitudes of conscious sinners has this blessed doctrine saved from despair here on earth, and from the “blackness of darkness for ever” in hell! Adored be his name who inspired these words, and blessed be the hand that wrote them. “The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin.”

¹ 1 John i. 7.

² 1 Tim. iii. 16.

³ 2 Cor. v. 21.

We have reason to bless God, not only for the doctrine of His grace as being unequivocally announced in the verbal declarations of Scripture; but also for the confirmation which that doctrine receives from the exemplifications of its truth, which are also recorded in the holy volume. We have there exemplifications of this truth, that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,” furnished by the general testimony of “a great cloud of witnesses,” the “multitude which no man can number, who had washed their robes, and made them white, in the blood of the Lamb;”¹ and we have particular and special patterns of mercy, whose names and memoirs give increased force to this blessed doctrine. Among the latter St. Paul exhibits himself in his first letter to Timothy; and as such David exhibits himself in this invaluable document, the fifty-first Psalm.

Let us remark how the penitent Psalmist has, again and again, brought his sin to remembrance; and that, by writing this Psalm, by introducing it into the service of the Temple, and by leaving it on record among his other compositions, he has perpetuated that remembrance to all future generations, even to the end of time. Can his motive be mistaken! Was it not that he might memorialize the mercy he obtained, and encourage

¹ Revelation vii. 9, 14.

others by his own example to hope in the same mercy? He had no fear of any antinomian tendency in the inference to be drawn from his history. He had no apprehension that the doctrine it taught might be abused. If any were disposed to say, "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound," it would be at their own peril: and even should an impenitent sinner abuse the cordial to an exacerbation of the frenzy of ungodliness, this could be no reason for withholding that cordial from the lips of the fainting exhausted penitent. Its effect on his own soul was purifying as well as comforting; and he knew that this is the genuine effect of the grace of God, whenever it is truly received into the heart.

Blessed be God for the example afforded by the experience of the Psalmist. We do not rejoice in his sin: we do not make light of it. But we admire and adore the wisdom of God in permitting such a man to fall so deeply and so foully; and his mercy in pardoning sins, so heinous and provoking as to be almost, all their circumstantials being considered, without a parallel. His repentance teaches us the bitterness of sin; and the pardon he obtained, attests the unbounded compassion of Him, from whom we also as sinners have to implore forgiveness. Had David's career of Godliness been steady and undeviating, like that of Daniel; or had his sin and repentance been buried in oblivion; we

should not have had the fifty-first Psalm to cheer us with the hope of mercy, and to direct us how to obtain it.

In our present text the penitent sinner stigmatizes his offence, by naming it in its principal feature without circumlocution, in a more humiliating manner than he had hitherto adopted. He charges himself with murder, or rather, if we attend to the plural termination of the original word, with accumulated murders. True repentance banishes false shame; the hope of mercy produces free confession.

In the words now before us we have to consider—

1. THE PENITENT'S RENEWED PRAYER FOR THE PARDON OF HIS SIN; AND

2. HIS VOW OF THANKSGIVING WHEN HIS PRAYER SHOULD BE ANSWERED.

1. HIS RENEWED PRAYER FOR THE PARDON OF HIS SIN. “*Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation.*”

The phrase “blood-guiltiness” (the word in the Hebrew is plural¹) may be understood in two senses, neither of which is inapplicable to David's case.

It may refer to the murders he had committed, some of which were intentional, and as directly his own acts as if they had been perpetrated with

¹ *Marg.* “Bloods.”

his own hand. The blood of his faithful servant Uriah, and of all who fell with him under the walls of Rabbah, (how many the history has not recorded) lay on the guilty head of the monarch who had directed their being exposed and deserted, in order that they might be cut off by the hands of the enemy. Nothing can well be conceived more revolting to the common principles of humanity and honour than this secret instruction given to Joab as commander-in-chief of David's army. He was, moreover, guilty of the blood of the child, who had been stricken with mortal sickness in consequence of his sin. He had directly endangered his own soul, and that of the guilty participant of his crime. The subsequent fratricide, and all the other enormities, which followed in his own family, and which Nathan announced to him, were to be traced to his sin ; and the souls of thousands, and tens of thousands, might have suffered fatally by his example, had not the penitence given him, and the record of that penitence by his own hand, provided an antidote to the deadly poison which his conduct had mixed.

The phrase " blood-guiltiness " as used by the Psalmist, may, perhaps, refer also to the danger to which he had exposed his own bodily life. Murder has been, by the law of all nations, a capital offence, from the period of its first commission by the unnatural act of the fratricide

Cain. The law given to Noah, after the flood, and renewed at Mount Sinai, explicitly denounced the just punishment of this most heinous crime. "He that sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."¹ And though David had no superior on earth to carry into effect the sentence of this most equitable law, he knew that God could, either by the stroke of His almighty providence, or by any instrument that He choose to employ, execute his righteous vengeance upon him. But as Nathan had announced, before the composition of this Psalm, that "the Lord had put away his sin, and that he should not die," as he was liable to do ; perhaps, we may conclude that, in our text, he refers to the guilt and danger which he had brought on his soul.

The manner in which David has recorded the enormity of his sin, leads us to remark that a true penitent is made willing to confess the guilt and atrocity of his greatest sins without any concealment or palliation. If they have been public offences, whereby the church of God has been scandalised and wounded, and the profession of Godliness brought into contempt, a public confession and [humiliation, commensurate in notoriety with the offence given, will be resorted to as the only reparation in the penitent's power : if the offence have been against God in secret,

¹ Genesis ix. 6.

confession and contrition will mark the penitent's private approaches to the mercy-seat.

But ignorance and self-righteousness may propose the inquiry, 'What have we to do with the enormities of David's conduct? We thank God that we have not sinned as he sinned. Our conduct has, happily, been the very reverse of his.' If this language be meant to attribute an exemption from overt acts of transgression against the law of the second table to the restraining or converting grace of God;—if it be accompanied with a consciousness that we, like David, were "born in iniquity, and that in sin did our mothers conceive us;" that, without the restraints of education, of civil association, and exposed to the same temptations, if left by God to the propensities of our own fallen hearts, we should have acted as David did—then the language may be exempted from the charge of ignorance and pride. But if it be a claim to any superiority of natural character, independently of a difference of circumstances, then does that charge attach to it: it is then the spirit of the Pharisee in our Lord's parable,¹ in full operation.

Has there, however, been nothing in our own spirit and conduct which bears a resemblance to the crime of the Psalmist? Let us bring this inquiry to the test, and see if there be no cause

¹ Luke xviii. 11.

for humiliation of heart in our confessions, on a like account? Is there not such a sin as spiritual murder stigmatized in the word of God? Are not suicide, fratricide, and Deicide therein charged on man, as virtually included in impenitence, irreligion, and a rejection of the Gospel? Does not Jehovah bring a charge of suicide against His people Israel, when He says, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself?"¹ Was not the character given to the arch-murderer, Satan,² the result of his tempting man to destroy his soul by disobedience to God? Do we not read of those who "crucify the Son of God afresh?"³

But to be more particular—Have we not, for a longer or shorter time, acted in a way that must, without Divine interposition, have proved destructive to our own souls? "The wages of sin is death:"⁴ nay, eternal death is the unavoidable consequence of a state of impenitence and rejection of Christ; as much so as the extinction of corporeal life is the consequence of a sufficient dose of a poisonous drug. Every act of sin is a stab in the vitals of the soul. The Gospel has called to us in the loud voice of intreaty, which Paul and Silas addressed to the intentionally suicidal jailor, "Do thyself no harm."⁵ But have we not been inattentive to the momentous caution, and persisted in a self-murderous career?

¹ Hosea xiii. 9.

² John viii. 44.

³ Heb. vi. 6.

⁴ Rom. vi. 23.

⁵ Acts xvi. 28.

Again—St. Paul warns the Romans against the danger which might arise from certain indulgences, not in themselves unlawful, of destroying “those for whom Christ died.”¹ The destruction to which he refers is evidently that of the soul. With respect to his own ministry, he could say, “I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”² But has there been nothing in our spirit and conduct—nothing in our conversation, our example, or our temper, which may have endangered, directly or indirectly, the souls of our families, or of our neighbours? Have we infused no subtle poison into the cup we have handed to them? Have we pointed no dagger which may, in possibility, have pierced their hearts? Have we not led them, or encouraged their approach, to a precipice over which they have fallen headlong?

O my soul, to what feelings of fear and of regret do these questions give rise! I have not only been my own enemy, but the enemy of all around me! I have not only done all I could to destroy my own soul; but I have endangered the souls of others also! Truly salvation must be of grace. “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation.”

But is there nothing further chargeable on the

¹ Rom. xiv. 15.

² Acts xx. 26.

impenitent professor of Christianity? Has not the Scripture mentioned the sin of “crucifying the Son of God afresh?” Indeed, His crucifixion eighteen centuries before we were born, was occasioned by our sins. “He was wounded for our transgressions—He was bruised for our iniquities—The chastisement of our peace was upon him.”¹ Let us not merge our share in this transaction by referring to the general character of the imputation, which rendered His death necessary to the expiation on which our salvation was suspended;—we have been accessories after the fact:—nor exonerate ourselves by censuring the Jewish priest and the Roman soldier. Our sins gave tone to the voices of the priests, which required that He should be slain, and as it were, nerved the arm which executed the sentence. He died, “THE JUST ONE instead of the unjust, to bring us to God.”² The cry of “Crucify him, crucify Him,” was not the less injurious, because it was the cry of a multitude of voices; nor was the sin of the Jewish rulers at all extenuated by employing others to drive the nails and force the spear.

But impenitence is a renewal of the murderous act. It is, virtually, a vindication of the atrocious deed of blood. To neglect the salvation which Jesus died to procure, is, as far as in us lies, to

¹ Isaiah liii. 5.

² 1 Pet. iii. 18.

negative the necessity of His death as an atonement for sin. We mean not to say that the impenitence of a Christian professor is the hopeless state of the apostate whom the Apostle has denounced as finally lost,¹ because we know that thousands of such persons are, like David, continually “renewed to repentance;” but it may be asserted that a state of practical unbelief is, while it is persisted in, and to the extent to which it reaches, a careless trampling under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant an unholy or common thing.

Let us not lightly pass over the prayer of our text, as if we were altogether free from the guilt in which the original suppliant found himself involved. Our church has taught us to make this prayer our own by its introduction into several of her services, and especially her commination office. Our own lips have often uttered it; but have our hearts joined in it with a consciousness of personal criminality? Let the inquiry be renewed: Have we not, by the preference we have given to the world, the robber and murderer of souls, and a consequent rejection of Christ from the pre-eminence in our affections which He claims for Himself, and to which he is justly entitled, joined in the cry of the Jewish rabble, “Not this man, but Barabbas?”²

¹ Hebrews vi. 6.

² If this prayer of the penitent Psalmist be suited to furnish

Let us now advert to the appropriate term by which the prayer for pardon is expressed in our text. “*Deliver* me from blood-guiltiness, O God.” I will not venture to assert that David employed the term he uses in the evangelical sense of which it is capable, and in which it is often elsewhere used, though I feel no difficulty in supposing that he did so understand it. He was the amanuensis of the Holy Spirit in writing this Psalm; and the expressions which it contains are those “groanings” to which utterance cannot be fully given, and of which the Spirit of God is the Author, while making intercession in our hearts, by teaching us to pray for ourselves.

The verb which is rendered by the English word *deliver*, signifies deliverance by affording shelter or protection. It is applied in Scripture to any thing which by intervention screens from existing or impending danger or evil. The shelter of a house, a tree, a mountain, and of Jonah’s gourd, is expressed by this significant word.¹ Thus Noah and his family were saved in the ark; and thus the mercy-seat, sprinkled with the blood of atonement, hid the tables of the law from the sight of Jehovah, symbolically covering all offences

matter for solemn self-examination to private Christians, how much more so to ministers of the word and sacraments! Oh! who can say with St. Paul, “I am pure from the blood of all men?” Acts xx. 26.

¹ Gen. xix. 8. Judges ix. 15. Jonah iv. 5. &c.

against them from the eye of justice and the stroke of vengeance. It is used in a figurative sense, and, in the form of a noun, rendered by the word *shadow* in the 91st Psalm; “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under *the shadow* of the Almighty:” and it is applied still more directly to the Gospel-salvation, as it occurs in Isaiah xxxii. 2: “A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest,—as rivers of water in a dry place, and *the shadow* of a great rock in a weary land.” The penitent believer understands and enjoys these figurative representations of the evangelical prophet. They are exemplified in his own experience, and precious to his own soul.

Here then, we meet afresh with “the great mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh.” Deliverance from the curse of the law is effected by interposition. That curse fell on the interposing object. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us.” The storm, the tempest, the destroying heat of Divine wrath, spent themselves on Him. “It was exacted, and He was made answerable.”¹ Happy the soul who is thus overshadowed by that interposing shield which no evil can penetrate. O my soul, lie thou in security under it for “the little moment, until the indignation be overpast!”

¹ Lowth’s translation of Isaiah liii. 7.

A truly penitent sinner cannot look for, or, indeed, desire salvation in any other way than that which Divine wisdom and mercy have prescribed and revealed. But the salvation of the Gospel comes recommended to his heart as being not only consistent with the honour of God, but also as the appointed means of manifesting His glory. With delight he learns from his Bible, that "God can be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."¹ He is taught that the exercise of faith in Jesus is an ascription of praise, respectively, to all the Persons of the Godhead;² and that, in believing that the blood of Jesus Christ hath virtue to cleanse from all sin, not excepting "blood-guiltiness" in all its enormity of offence, he is concurring in the declaration from heaven, "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Penitence and faith, as means and expressions of spiritual life, resemble expiration and inspiration in the functions of animal life. They have a mutual relation to each other. They co-exist, and cannot exist apart.

Let us notice the emphasis which the prayer in our text derives from the manner in which its object is addressed. The appeal is made to God in His covenant-relation to fallen man, with a view to which the plural name of God, indicating His varied character, as our Father, Redeemer, and

¹ Rom. iii. 26.

² 2 Cor. iv. 6.

Sanctifier, is employed.¹ To this is added a specific mention of the object proposed by the covenant of redemption, the “salvation” of lost sinners. “Deliver me, O God of my salvation.” To an interest in this salvation, the suppliant prefers an humble claim, which, in his circumstances, and indeed in every instance of an awakened mind, indicates a vigorous exercise of faith: “O God of *my* salvation.” Such language, while it cherishes hope in the contrite bosom, gives glory to God.—“Thou, O Jesus, art able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Thee.² Thou art able, through the right acquired by Thine atoning and all-sufficient sacrifice; and Thou art willing, for it was the express object of Thine advent to our world to save that which was lost.³ Thou hast given us full assurance in Thy word that Thou wilt cast out none who come to Thee.⁴ Blessed Saviour, I am resolved (and I feel a secret influence enabling me) to put my whole trust in Thee, notwithstanding the heinous guilt under the burden of which I labour, and my utter destitution of any other recommendation to Thy notice, or qualification for Thy salvation, than the heinousness of my sin and the danger of my state. Thou ‘God of my salvation,’ Thou hast provided the means, and Thou hast promised the blessing.

¹ See Lecture 1.² Heb. xii. 25.³ Matthew xviii. 11.⁴ John vi. 37.

To Thy cross as the means, and to Thy salvation as the promised blessing, I must and will cling as my only hope of escape from the wrath to come.’

We proceed to consider—

2. THE PENITENT’S VOW OF THANKSGIVING, WHEN HIS PRAYER SHOULD BE ANSWERED.—

“*My mouth shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.*”

The royal penitent, from whose pen and heart this vow proceeded, had been “the sweet singer of Israel” before his grievous fall. Many of his hymns of praise were written before his brows were encircled with that diadem which proved so dangerous to him. In his days of adversity his holy soul was the organ of the prophetic Spirit, and was carried forward in delightful contemplation of Him who was to appear in the twofold relation of his son and Lord. He had been numbered among those favoured persons who, as with one mouth,¹—as if one and the same organ of speech had been common to them all,—spake of the Lord Jesus, of His sufferings, and of the glory that should follow. In David’s case, as in that of all the other holy seers who preceded or followed him, “the testimony of Jesus was “the spirit of prophecy.”²

O once happy son of Jesse, indulged with such visions, and enjoying communion with God in solitude, while watching thy sheep at Bethlehem,

¹ Luke i. 70. Acts iii. 18, 21.

² Revelations xix. 10.

and anticipating the scene of glory there to be exhibited, when the multitude of the heavenly host should join in thy strains, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!” what carnal gratification, what worldly advantages, can compensate for the loss of such feelings as were thine in those favoured moments! How changed thy state of heart, while the burden of guilt, the gloom of apprehension,—regret at the past, and alarm at the future,—weighed down thy soul!¹ How rich the grace which hath again quickened to penitence and hope!

The length of the interval between David’s fall and his restoration to spiritual sensibility, is uncertain; but it seems to have been a considerable period. During this interval his mouth had been shut, his harp unstrung, and his pen laid aside. His heart could have no relish for his former heavenly employment. The prevalence of sin had silenced his strains of praise. And, since his soul had been quickened anew, guilt still closed his lips. But he now longed to resume the proper work of a regenerate heart, the work of adoration and praise; and hence he subjoins to his prayer for deliverance from the guilt and power of sin the vow of thanksgiving found in the latter clause of our text. Make known to me

¹ Psalm xxxii. 3, 4.

Thy pardoning mercy, seal forgiveness on my heart, restore peace to my wounded conscience, “and my mouth shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.”

But could the penitent mean that his future acknowledgments of mercy received would be any remuneration for the boon he implored? Did he propose a bribe to the God of his salvation? Did he imagine that goodness foreseen is the cause of grace communicated? Oh no: it was his own benefit, and not a requital of his heavenly Benefactor, that he had in view. Like an asthmatic patient, he felt the difficulty of respiration in the spiritual atmosphere to which he was restored; but his bosom heaved, he panted to be again enabled to breathe freely in it. Reciprocity and acknowledgment constitute “the life of God in the soul of man.”

The subject which the Psalmist proposed for his notes of thanksgiving must surprise and puzzle those who are strangers to the foundation of hope laid in the Gospel of Christ. He does not say, “My mouth shall sing aloud of Thy forbearance, or of Thy mercy; though, doubtless, he was conscious, that God had exercised amazing forbearance in sparing him from the destruction which his provocations had deserved, and that an act of forgiveness would be an overwhelming proof of Divine mercy. But he selects the “*righteousness*” of God, His equity in the pardon of

sin, as the theme on which he proposed to dwell in his future songs. This is the last of the Divine perfections which, in such a case, and for such a purpose, an uninstructed mind would have chosen. But David knew, what every truly penitent soul also knows, that forgiveness of sin is not an act of mere compassion, of mercy estranged from justice, of benevolence irrespective of equity and truth. Remarkable is the combination of character in the prophet's annunciation of Jehovah as being "a just God and a Saviour,"¹ corresponding with the declaration of St. John, "that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."² The Gospel is characterised by St. Paul as "the word of righteousness,"³ unskilfulness in which is evidence of infancy in the state of grace. In many other Psalms, we find truth, faithfulness, and righteousness united with mercy, in the celebrations of praise with which they abound; and these attributes are spoken of as unchangeable and everlasting. Indeed, the perfections of God are inseparable from His existence. If the penalty of His law, or its requisition of perfect obedience, had been abandoned in the method prescribed for the salvation of sinners, God would have abandoned His own character. But this was impossible. The purgatorial atone-

¹ Isaiah xlv. 21.² 1 Epist. i. 9.³ Heb. v. 13.

ment and the second justification of the papist, and the remedial law of the false protestant, are alike contradictions to scripture doctrine, and blasphemies against the perfections of God. For ever blessed be His name who hath taught us, that He can be “just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” By this glorious truth a solid basis is laid for the hope of salvation. Therein the awakened soul finds repose. This is the ark of safety to which the contrite spirit, taught by the heavenly Dove, repairs, having sought but found elsewhere no rest for the sole of her foot.¹ The payment of the penalty of transgression by our Divine Surety, and His fulfilment of the righteousness which the law of God demanded,² constitute the object of Christian faith, and the solace of the penitent heart. “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.”³

As the Psalmist’s purpose of celebrating the praises of God, the God of his salvation, will be the subject of the following lecture, we shall not enlarge on it in this, further than to observe that those who have obtained mercy will unite in David’s resolution, and ascribe in their hearts, by their lips, and in their lives, all glory to God. If we are conscious of no desire to glorify Him, we have reason to suspect both our penitence and

¹ Gen. viii. 9. ² Dan. ix. 24. comp. with Rom. iii. 24—26.

³ Romans iii. 31.

our faith, as being merely nominal and unavailing to salvation. Faith and love are correlative and inseparable—the latter is the evidence of the former. When therefore our Lord declared that, “he who believeth not, shall be damned ;”¹ and when St. Paul declared that if any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, he is accursed ;² these declarations are essentially the same in their import, though they appear in a different shape.

The subject of a saved sinner’s song in heaven will be identified with his song in the house of his pilgrimage on earth. “Salvation to God and the Lamb” will be his theme for ever.³ And while the Lamb slain is ever recognised in this ascription, David’s vow in our text will be in a course of everlasting fulfilment—“MY MOUTH SHALL SING ALOUD OF THY RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

¹ Mark xvi. 16.

² 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

³ Rev. vii. 10.

PSALM LI. 15.

O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth Thy praise.

IT is the chief excellence of the service used by the members of the established church, that its language is so largely borrowed from the holy Scriptures. So far as it is so, if no further, the declaration of Parliament in the reign of King Edward VI., that the Book of Common Prayer was compiled “BY THE AID OF THE HOLY GHOST,” may be fully justified. By far the greater part of the volume consists of His own words.

The Psalms of David are especially adapted for giving utterance to our devotional feelings in prayer and praise. “That,” says Bishop Horne, “which we read as matters of speculation in the other Scriptures, is reduced to practice when we read it in the Psalms ; in those repentance and faith are described, but in these they are acted ; by a perusal of the former, we learn how others served God, but, by using the latter, we serve Him ourselves.” To these inspired compositions

our Liturgy, both in its daily and occasional services, is greatly indebted. From the Psalms the Jews borrowed the larger part of their Liturgy; —from the same source the primitive Christian church derived much of theirs; and this pattern the Reformers of our own church followed in their compilation. The devotional language of the Psalms is suited to the use of all persons, and under all circumstances.

The words of our text are copied into our Prayer Book. They form one of the responsive interlocations, appointed to be used by the minister and the congregation after the Lord's prayer at the opening of morning and evening service. They were anciently transcribed into Christian Liturgies, and they hold the same station in our service, as that which they have in the Psalm to which they primarily belong. They follow the act of self-humiliation in "the general confession," and "the absolution," or declaration of God's mercy to "all them that are penitent." The propriety of this connexion with confession and pardoning mercy has appeared in our discussion of the former verse, and will be more apparent in the present lecture.

Is there not something of self-correction, or, at least, of caution against mistake, in the words now before us? David had said, "Deliver me, &c., and my mouth shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness." It might be replied, Can you then

ensure the gratitude of your heart and the praises of your lips? Has not past experience taught you that no dependance is to be placed on your resolutions and vows? Have you not broken those which were implied in the rite of circumcision, and those which you verbally addressed to God in the time of past trouble? Have you yet to learn, that “the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?” To such questions the Psalmist may be supposed to reply in the words of our text. Let it not be inferred because I have said, “My mouth shall sing aloud of God’s righteousness,” that I place any confidence in myself, as being sufficient of myself to do any thing as of myself. I well know that my sufficiency is of God; and that it is His grace that must “work in me both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” I therefore implore that grace, and say, “Open THOU my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise;” or rather, I profess that my trust is only in Him,—“Thou shalt, or wilt,¹ open my lips, and (then) my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.” Penitence implies a conviction of present and future spiritual impotency, as well as of past transgression; and this conviction of utter incompetency to every good thought, word, and work, is one of those symptoms of a regenerate state, which distinguish a

¹ The verb is in the future tense.

genuine from a counterfeit repentance. A consciousness of past failures in duty may occasion regret, while self-confidence, with regard to future faithfulness, is cherished in the heart. I have sinned, but I will sin no more, is the language of an unhumiliated spirit. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe," is the language which bespeaks a just acquaintance with our own state. The believer looks to Jesus for "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption ;¹ and his constant avowal is this, "By the grace of God I am what I am."²

We shall not make any formal division of the words now before us, but shall consider the three following propositions as arising out of them.

1. THAT THE FACULTY OF SPEECH, AND THE POWER OF EMPLOYING IT TO ITS RIGHT END, ARE THE GIFTS OF GOD.

2. THAT THIS POWER OF EMPLOYING THE NATURAL FACULTY OF SPEECH TO ITS RIGHT END IS LOST TO FALLEN MAN.

3. THAT ITS RENEWAL OUGHT TO BE THE SUBJECT OF EARNEST PRAYER BY EVERY FALLEN CREATURE, AND IS SO BY EVERY PENITENT SINNER.

1. THAT THE FACULTY OF SPEECH, AND THE POWER OF EMPLOYING IT TO ITS RIGHT END, ARE THE GIFTS OF GOD.

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

² 1 Cor. xv. 10.

The organs by which language is expressed are, confessedly, the curious workmanship of God. He expressly claims them as the work of His own hands. "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I Jehovah?"¹ By this endowment, in connexion with the gift of reason, man is distinguished from the brute animal. This is so completely a truism with all who are not Atheists in theory, that any reference to the subject would have been unnecessary, but for the purpose of reproving the practical Atheism of the human heart. Man forgets that he is indebted for this inestimable faculty to the distinguishing goodness of God, his Creator and Benefactor.

But this is not all that is intended by the first branch of our proposition, that "the faculty of speech is the gift of God." The necessity of Divine instruction in the use of the organs of speech, in the case of the first parent of mankind, who could have no other teacher than God, has been maintained by many great and learned men. Is it to be supposed that Adam could have discovered, and that at once, the possession of such organs? Is it not more rational to infer from the brief narrative of Moses, that language itself, and the power of giving utterance to it by articu-

¹ Exodus iv. 11.

late sounds, were the result of Divine revelation to his mind?¹

But we only glance at these philosophical points. The proper occupation of this place is not philosophy, but the truths of practical Godliness. We therefore proceed to the second branch of the proposition before us, "that the power of employing the faculty of speech to its right end, is also the gift of God." What then is the grand purpose for which this important faculty has been bestowed on man? Is its object to be confined to the intercourse with his fellow men, which his necessities, conveniences, or pleasures, require him to hold on the concerns of his earthly existence? Surely not. The holy object proposed to himself by the penitent in our text, is the proper and most important employment of this inestimable gift of God. "Open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." The sounds broken and modulated by our lips, whether in the common intercourse of life, or in public or social worship, ought to be expressions of grateful love. The "Hallelujah" Psalms, (as the last five Psalms in the volume have been denominated) which, perhaps, describe the blessedness of the Millennial church, show us what is the proper use of the human tongue.

It may be supposed that angels, though spiri-

¹ See the preface to Parkhurst's Hebrew Lexicon, page 2, and the authorities by him referred to under the root **הקל**.

tual or immaterial subsistences, possess a faculty of articulating sounds. Various instances of their doing so occur in scripture, with regard both to intercourse with men and ascriptions of praise to God. The top of Sinai and the plain of Bethlehem will afford specimens of the fact. In the mystic book of the Revelation of St. John we are often introduced to “the angels who are around the throne of God;” and what is the use which they are represented as making of the faculty of speech, in whatever way they possess it? Do they not consecrate its service to the glory of God? And are we not bound to imitate them in this their high privilege and unquestionable duty?

Is there any thing, among the abounding proofs of the fallen state of man, more conclusive than the virtual declaration of practical infidelity every where to be heard,—“Our lips are our own, who is Lord over us?” What is the general tenor of conversation among those who bear the Christian name, and who, in the weekly service of their church, offer with their lips the Psalmist’s prayer—“O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise?” Is it in unison with the prayer they use; or rather, does it not discover a state of the affections diametrically opposed to the spiritual desires and devout aspirations breathed in the Liturgy in which they orally join?

We proceed to consider—

2. THAT THE POWER OF EMPLOYING THE FACULTY OF SPEECH TO ITS RIGHT END, IS LOST TO FALLEN CREATURES, AND THAT GOD ONLY CAN RENEW IT.

The inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen man is not a physical but a moral inability. When those who maintain the doctrine of original sin in its scriptural extent, and the doctrines of grace in their scriptural fulness, are charged with describing the degenerate and impotent children of Adam as destitute of any freedom of will, the patrons of these scriptural doctrines are misrepresented. It is not a freedom of volition, but its independency on the corrupt bias of nature with respect to evil, and on Divine agency with respect to good, which they deny to man. The essence of the malignity attributable to devils, lies in the bias of their will; in their hatred of God; and the essence of the holiness which is attributed to the angels who kept their first estate, and to saints made perfect, lies in the holy bias of the heart, or their love to God, originated and maintained by His Holy Spirit. An *independent creature* is a contradiction in terms.

When therefore we speak of “the power of employing the faculty of speech to its right end,” as “lost to fallen man,” its legitimate object being the discovery of love to God; we speak of disinclination, aversion, and hostility to God, as

seated in the heart, and disqualifying the lips for fulfilling their proper office. It is not a physical but a moral disqualification which we ascribe to man in his natural state. His organs of speech remain the same, and he has the power of using them; but he is “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, because of the blindness of his heart.”¹

Nor do we deny to man in his unconverted state the will to join formally in the service of God. Many carnal motives may be mentioned as producing such formal service, punctuality in its performance, and zeal for its credit. But that, of which we maintain the impossibility, is the effusion of a grateful heart in words of praise, till the heart has been renewed by the converting grace of God.

The sad case of physical defect, relieved by the almighty power of Christ, which is recorded in Matthew xii. 22, 23, is, in a spiritual view, our own, till the same almighty power has unloosed our tongues. In relation to the use of our lips in giving glory to their Author, we are as dumb as the beasts that perish. We speak not TO God in daily prayer and praise, though our daily wants, temporal and spiritual, peremptorily demand the former, and our daily mercies the latter. We speak not OF God, of His excellences and our

¹ Eph. iv. 18. Rom. viii. 7.

dependance on Him, in our social intercourse, but give a decided preference to every other topic of conversation. We speak not FOR God in our commerce with the world, though we witness the indignity which is every where poured on His most holy name.

Let us inquire into the causes of this lamentable condition to which man is reduced. It is indeed lamentable, as it marks his degradation from his primeval state in paradise, and his disqualification for the happiness of heaven. "Ye must be born again; for except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. That which is born of the flesh, is flesh: marvel not that I said unto you, ye must be born again." The radical cause, to be traced up to the great forfeiture, is the privation of that spiritual life which was communicated to the soul of our first parent, and was maintained, till sin entered, by what Bishop Horsley calls "the commerce of the human soul with the Divine Spirit." Man is "dead in trespasses and sins." All the spiritual faculties he once possessed are palsied, lifeless, and useless. He is indeed alive, but it is an "earthly, sensual, and devilish"¹ life which he now possesses, and of which he exercises the functions. "He cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works,

¹ James iii. 15.

to faith and calling upon God." "We have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."¹ The torpor, the pride, and the enmity of the human heart, in its unregenerated state, preclude the possibility of that devotion of the lips to the service of God, the restoration of which the penitent suppliant implored in the words of our text.

But there is also a cause of sinful silence which continues to be operative after that the torpor of indifference has given place to spiritual sensibility, after that the pride of self-righteousness has been laid low, and the natural enmity of the heart towards God has been converted into desire after Him. This cause is guilt—a consciousness of imputed, native, and actual sin. The employment of the lips in praise must depend, therefore, on our apprehension of that atonement which alone can remove guilt from the conscience. The *Epphatha* of a revealed Saviour is essential to the utterance of praise. Conviction of sin, and conversion to God, are the work of His Spirit; and these are necessary to the production of a grateful heart and its utterance in the new song of praise. "No man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, that were redeemed from the earth."²

¹ Article 10.

² Revelations xii. 3.

Our remaining proposition, gathered from the text, was—

3. THAT THE RENEWAL OF THIS POWER, (viz., that of employing the natural faculty of speech to its right end, which is lost to fallen man) OUGHT TO BE THE SUBJECT OF EARNEST PRAYER TO EVERY FALLEN CREATURE, AND IS SO TO EVERY PENITENT SINNER.

It was the earnest prayer of the penitent Psalmist : it is that of the church in all her assemblies. Is it the object of fervent desire in our hearts ? Let us consider what was the object which God proposed in the creation of rational beings—was it not that they might “ show forth His praise.” If that object be frustrated, so far as it is in our power to frustrate it, what must the result be, but that while God will, through other means, secure the glory of His own name ; those who not only negative the very purpose of their existence, but have desecrated the temple built for His honour to the service of sin and Satan, must be for ever banished from His presence, and separated from the society of those who show forth His praise ? Is the happiness of a rational and immortal being necessarily dependant on God, and derivable only from His favour ?—must it consist in communion with Him as his Father and Friend ?—then how earnest should we be for a removal of that estrangement from Him which sin has introduced, and a restoration of that friendship with Him, which

the mediation of His Blessed Son was appointed to re-open ! What is the life of faith, in its native result, but a life of love, expressing itself in acts of thanksgiving ? It is a Scriptural maxim, that “ Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart ” (the heart being renewed by the grace of God) “ bringeth forth good things : and an evil man out of the evil treasure ” of an unrenewed heart, “ bringeth forth evil things.” For “ by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”¹ With this agrees the declaration of St. Paul, that “ With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”²

Every penitent sinner understands and cordially unites in the Psalmist’s prayer. “ O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise ; ” or, if we render the former verb in the future tense, and so read the words as the language of hope founded on Divine promise, every penitent believer derives his comfort from the same blessed hope : “ Thou, O Lord, shalt open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.”³ The prayer or profession of faith is addressed to the Lord Christ ; for the title by

¹ Matthew xii. 34—37.

² Romans x. 10.

³ The word which is rendered praise, primarily imports eradia-

which its gracious Object is invoked, is peculiarly His title, and was known by David as such.¹ It is from Him that the believer expects that enlargement of heart and lips which is the scope of his fervent desire. It can be produced by no other means than an experimental acquaintance with the efficacy of His atoning blood and justifying righteousness. He only can say, "Epphatha, be opened;"² and when He is pleased to speak the powerful word, then "the tongue of the dumb sings,"³ and the praise of the adorable Deliverer becomes the theme of the everlasting song.

The language of our text is suited to the feelings of the penitent believer throughout the life of faith. The prayer is for daily use; the devout expectation is that of daily experience. Whatever may be the advancement made in knowledge and grace, all believers feel a remaining impediment in the spiritual faculty of speech, and long and wait for its removal. Our hearts are often dull and stupid, and never so grateful as we know they ought, and as we wish them to be. Sometimes a worldly spirit, and sometimes a sense of guilt,

tion from a luminous body. The high ambition of a penitent soul is that of becoming a reflector, by which the glories of "the Sun of Righteousness" may be more widely diffused on the world of men and angels.

¹ See Psalm cx. 1. Isaiah vi. 1, compare with John xii. 41.

² Mark vii. 32.

³ Isaiah xxxv. 6.

disqualifies us for the celebration of the praise which is due to our redeeming God. Our lips are too often closed again, after they have been once opened; and a repetition of the miracle of touching our tongue afresh with the finger of almighty love is as necessary as it was at first. The live-coal, taken from the altar,¹ must be continually laid on the mouth, in order that the lips may show forth the praise of Him who is the Lord of Hosts, the King of Glory.

The consciousness of that incapacity which is implied in the text, makes the believer long for the arrival of the time when it shall be no longer felt. There are seasons when he anticipates, with delightful expectancy, the removal of all impediments in that employment which is heaven begun on earth, and will be the essence of the future happiness of saints. He longs to join in the unfettered and everlasting Hallelujah of the great multitude which no man can number.

O let the penitent soul be encouraged in imploring this blessing by a consideration of the object proposed by it. What is that object? It is the glory of the Triune Jehovah. While imploring this enlargement of heart and lips, the believer's desires are in unison with that which must be the end of all the dispensations of God; with the aim of the whole scheme of redemption;

¹ Isaiah vi. 6, 7.

with the sympathies of the universal church ; with the scope of His work who is the Author of these desires, and who maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.¹

Let the unregenerate sinner, whose impenitence renders him dumb, with respect to that which is the grand employment of the church of God, whether on earth or in heaven, tremble for his own safety. The end of his creation and redemption is not answered by him. He has no communion with those who are uniting in David's prayer, "Open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." He has no preparation of heart for the heavenly state. He will be "speechless" in the day of judgment. Oh, let him begin to lisp the cry for mercy, and he will soon be enabled to join in the song of praise.

¹ Romans viii. 27.

PSALM LI. 16, 17.

For Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it : Thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

THE second of these verses is introduced into our church Liturgy ; it is one of the introductory sentences with which the service opens. It is, as it were, one of the door-keepers, stationed at the entrance to the presence-chamber of the Great King, to point out to those who are seeking admission to His throne of Grace, the spiritual dress, the temper of mind in which they must appear, in order to ensure success.¹ The proposition which it contains is of vital importance, and of general application.

The prominent doctrine of our text is interwoven with the whole volume of Divine Revelation ; and the temper of mind which it enforces is required as an essential preparative to a beneficial interest in the mercy which is revealed in

¹ 1 Peter v. 5.

the Gospel. It is itself a leading branch of the great salvation, out of which every other branch of experimental and practical Godliness arises. It is intimately and vitally connected with every grace of the Christian character. It is the main spring of "Repentance towards God," and inseparable from "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." No work can be "pleasant and acceptable to God" unless it be begun, continued, and ended with "a broken and a contrite spirit."

But let us look more closely into the Psalmist's words, remembering that they were "written by inspiration of God." His plea throughout the Psalm had been the mercy and truth of God revealed to penitent sinners in the promises of His word. The penitent here assigns the reason why he had recourse to no other means of appeasing the wrath which he had justly incurred.

David, who, it will be recollected, lived under the Levitical dispensation (a dispensation of shadow originating in good things to come¹) makes no other allusion to ceremonial institutions than for the purpose of expressing, by language borrowed from them, his views of the spiritual salvation which he implored. It might have been expected that he should have said, 'I have sinned, and I must offer the appointed sacrifice for sin, the bullock or the goat. I am a great sinner ;

¹ Hebrews xi. 1.

and, as a king, I have the means of offering most expensive sacrifices in expiation of my enormous offences ; I will testify the bitterness of my repentance and the vigour of my faith by multiplied victims laid on the altar of my God.'

Such would have been the reasoning of an alarmed but unenlightened sinner. Such would have been the ground of hope in an unhumiliated soul, confounding the outward and visible sign with the inward and spiritual grace, the symbol with the thing signified by it. Such is the reasoning, under a change of circumstances, of unhumiliated minds in our own day. ' I have sinned, and must amend my life. I must pay more attention to religious duties, I must pray, receive the sacrament, and give alms to the poor.'

But the mind of the penitent Psalmist was too clearly instructed in the attributes and character of God, the nature of sin, and the appointed way of salvation, to be satisfied with any shadowy representations, ceremonial ordinances, or moral duties. He knew the necessity of the great atonement from which levitical rites derived all their value, and of that disposition of heart which is essential to an individual application of that atonement for peace of conscience and access to a holy God.

The two verses which call for our present consideration, contain a negative and a positive proposition ; the former denying the efficacy of

legal sacrifice, and the latter asserting the acceptableness of a broken and contrite spirit, as being that frame of mind which is necessary to an interest in the true atonement for sin, and which may be identified with faith in the sacrifice of Christ. We begin with

I. THE NEGATIVE PROPOSITION OF OUR TEXT. “*Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it.*” or (marg.) that I should give it: “*Thou delightest not in burnt-offering.*”

The proposition is stated in the form of an address to God. It is founded on His own word, by which only an appeal on the subject of salvation can be made to Him. It is a devout, contrite, submissive appeal to the revealed will of God. Oh, that the same temper prevailed in all who profess to draw nigh to Him, and to seek salvation from Him! Thereby error in sentiment, experience, and practice, would be precluded.

It may be useful, in explaining the Psalmist's negation of acceptableness to legal oblation in his own case, to take a hasty sketch of the origin, object, and effect of expiatory sacrifice, as offered in the patriarchal and levitical church, before the coming of Christ. The assertion of the text is to be confined to expiatory sacrifice, and extends to every species of such sacrifices.

The origin of sacrifice was a Divine revelation on the subject. This has been disputed; but on very untenable grounds. Sacrifice was offered

by Abel, and accepted by God ; and there is reason to infer, from the chapter of Genesis, which contains the history of the fall, that the institution of sacrifice accompanied, and was intended to illustrate, the first promise of redemption by Christ.¹ Indeed, the very notion of approaching God by the sacrifice of animal victims may be justly supposed to afford proof of a Divine origin. Had human wisdom been left to itself, in devising a plan of reconciliation with an offended God ; it would naturally have had recourse to personal rather than vicarious sufferings. Typical expiation by blood, in which animal life is seated, commenced with the fall, and terminated when the Great Antitype had given His life to be the ransom for all mankind.

The object of animal sacrifice was to “ show forth the Lord’s death,” till He came to “ put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” It was, virtually, the rehearsal of the creed of the church. It was confession of sin and an avowal of faith in the promised Saviour. When the sinner laid “ his hand on the head of his burnt-offering,” he, symbolically, uttered the confession of our church service ; and when, by a transfer of his guilt to his victim, he embraced the great atonement, he professed faith in the absolution or remission of sin, which the church, by oral testimony or signi-

¹ See Archbishop Magee’s very valuable work on the Atonement.

ficant rites, has always been empowered to declare in the name of God. The offerer recognized the just forfeiture of his own life, and enunciated his hope of having that forfeiture annulled by the death of a substitute. The act of sacrificing was, in short, a symbolic expression of all the feelings which are verbally expressed in our Psalm,—of “the broken and contrite spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

The effect of offering sacrifice, independently of faith in Christ, was a remission of temporal penalties incurred by omission of duty or commission of sin. But, without a reference to the sacrifice of Christ, animal victims, although offered by Divine appointment on the altar of God, had no efficacy with respect to actual pardon of sin, the pacification of the conscience, and the favour of God. No spiritual results were produced by them, but as the offerer looked through and beyond them to Christ crucified. But, inasmuch as they were prescribed anticipations of the one great and available atonement, God was pleased with them, and expressed delight in their oblation. Of this we have instances on record in the sacrifices of Abel, of Noah, and of Solomon. Yet when their design was forgotten, the act of sacrificing is spoken of with disgust and abhorrence;¹ and when their intention was accomplished

¹ Psalm l. 8, &c. Isaiah i. 11—15.

by the coming of Christ, to persevere in offering them was a rejection of the atonement made by His blood. Hence the difference between circumcision and baptism, between animal sacrifice and the eucharist. The former were bloody rites, prefiguring the necessity of expiation by blood ; the latter are bloodless rites, commemorating expiation as fully and eternally effected by the death of Him who is “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” The necessity of a personal application, with a view to personal interest in the promised blessing, is the same under both dispensations.

We now proceed to consider David’s negative proposition, “Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it : Thou delightest not in burnt offerings.” We are not to suppose that he meant any slight to the levitical sacrifice as the ordinance of God. He meant not to deny the Divine origin of sacrificature, nor the duty of a punctual compliance with every ordinance of God. We learn that, long after this, he offered appointed sacrifices with great solemnity ;¹ and we cannot doubt that he regularly and devoutly joined in the daily service of God’s altar. It is highly probable that, on the present occasion, he offered sacrifices of thanksgiving.

What then did the royal penitent mean when

¹ 2 Sam. xxiv. 25.

he said, "Thou, O God, requirest no sacrifice—Thou delightest not in burnt-offering?" Several important truths may be comprehended in this negation. He is to be understood as asserting—

1. That no typical sacrifices were allowed, even for the remission of the penalties assigned by the judicial law, in the case of presumptuous sins.¹ Idolatry, murder, adultery, and some other kinds of iniquity, were not included in the list of expiable offences. Death, without benefit of sacrificature, was, therefore, the penalty of David's sins. He owed his exemption from it to the will of the Supreme Lawgiver, declared by His authorised servant, Nathan. The case was an exception to a general rule. But though Divine wisdom and goodness saw fit to remit the capital punishment in this world, as well as to vouchsafe a more important blessing, even pardon in relation to the world to come; yet sufficient evidence was given in the continual crucifixion of his feelings, by disasters in his family and kingdom, of God's abhorrence of his sin.

2. That the spiritual efficacy of levitical sacrifices, even when they were offered according to Divine appointment, arose not from any virtue in themselves, but from the relation they bore to the sacrifice of Christ. This point is established by the Epistle to the Hebrews in the fullest manner.²

¹ Numb. xv. 30, 31.

² Heb. ix. 9; x. 1—14.

There is no equivalency between the life of a beast, and the redemption of a lost soul. The regard which God paid to His own institutions arose entirely from the character they bore as prefigurations of His beloved Son. Hence “the sweet savour” (Heb. the savour of rest) which they afforded Him. This remark will shed light on some other passages in which sacrifices are spoken of with indifference, and even with disgust and abhorrence, when unconnected with their great Antitype.¹ May we not then suppose the penitent to say in our text—‘I would omit no instituted means of grace. I would seek mercy in the way in which God has appointed to vouchsafe it. But I know that the inward disposition of the soul, the “broken and contrite spirit,” is that which, in connexion with His own plan of mercy, God regards. This is the temper of mind necessary to a reception of the atonement; this therefore I must cultivate as “the one thing needful,” without which outward forms can be of no avail.’

This Psalm was written for our instruction; for while David therein describes his own convictions, he, by these, teaches transgressors in all ages the ways of God, that “sinners may be converted to Him.” The Holy Ghost anticipates in our text, by the pen of David, the declaration

¹ See Psalm xl. 6; l. 8, 9. Isaiah i. 11. Jer. vii. 22. Hosea vi. 6. Micah vi. 6, 7.

of universal reference, made by our gracious Lord, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” He teaches us that self must be laid low, in order that Christ may be exalted. The spirit of legalism, or self-righteousness, has prevailed in every age of the church, and under every dispensation of the truth. It perverted the solemn rite of sacrifice under the Old Testament dispensation, distinctly and loudly as that rite proclaimed the guilt, misery, and helplessness of man. It now perverts the ordinances of the New Testament, clearly and fully as these ordinances proclaim the same truth. It ascribes to the *opus operatum* of baptism and the supper of the Lord the efficacy which belongs only to the inward and spiritual grace which the sacraments represent. It rests in the ablution of the body and a participation of corporeal aliment, instead of seeking the ablution of the soul from sin by the grace of Christ, and its support by feeding on His body and blood received by faith. The carnal Jew looked to the mere performance of his ceremonial rites as entitling him to the favour of God; and the carnal Christian does the same. The former, even in the effusion of sacrificial blood, “went about to establish his own righteousness?” and we, in the effusion of the commemorative wine, forget the self-condemning nature of the act in which we are required to join. How inveterate

is the perverseness of the fallen heart! Well might the prophet ask, "Who can know it?" To this principle may be traced the grand sin of the Jews, the self-tormenting superstition of the heathen, and the self-destroying formality of nominal Christians. This leads us to consider—

2. THE POSITIVE PROPOSITION OF OUR TEXT, STATING WHAT IS ALONE ACCEPTABLE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*"

In discoursing on this branch of our subject, several inquiries will arise out of it—What "a broken spirit," or "a broken and contrite heart," imports?—Why it is spoken of under the notion of a sacrifice?—Why, in describing it, the plural number is used instead of the singular—and what is that regard which God shows to it?

The expression, "a broken spirit," or, "a broken and contrite heart," means a state of mind depressed, humbled, and almost overwhelmed with affliction and grief, from whatever cause the affliction and grief may arise.¹ But as the phrase is used in our text, and in many other scriptures, the affliction which it describes is produced by a sense of sin. It is used, in relation to a penitent state of mind, in a parallel passage of another Psalm. "The Lord is nigh

¹ Psalm lxxiv. 21 ; cix. 1 6; cxlvii. 2, 3 ; Isa. lxi. 1.

unto them that are of a broken heart ; and will save such as be of a contrite spirit.”¹ David unquestionably meant by these figurative expressions that consciousness of the guilt he had contracted, of the blessings he had forfeited, and of the danger he had incurred by sinning against God, which opprest his soul. He refers to those feelings which our Psalm so fully explains—feelings of sorrow, regret, shame, self-renunciation, and a submission of heart to God’s method of saving sinners. These pungent feelings nothing but a hope of restoration to the favour of his justly offended God could allay.

The prophets have described the natural heart of man under the metaphor of a stone, hard, impenetrable, unimpressible by common means. But there is an instrument of sufficient power to break even the heart of stone. “Is not my word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces ?”² The word of God, as an instrument in the omnipotent hand of the Spirit of grace, revealing the terrors of the Lord and the persuasives of the Gospel, crushes, as it were, the heart of stone, and reforms it into a heart of flesh, soft and impressible as melted wax. There is a climax in the epithets by which a penitent heart is described in our text. The former denotes fracture, similar to that which the trees of Egypt suffered

¹ Psalm xxxiv. 18.

² Jer. xxiii. 29.

from the hailstorm, or which is produced in the waves of the sea when they break on the shore. The latter is applied to the pulverization produced by the operation of the mortar. There have been seasons in the believer's experience when he has been conscious of this distinction. For while his legal hopes are habitually shivered, like the trees of Egypt, so as to be rendered incapable of bearing the fruit which they once bore ; while the breakers on the shore of truth have shipwrecked his self-righteous expectations ; there have been moments in which his heart has been, as it were, pounded in the mortar of conviction, and every fragment of hope and comfort reduced to powder, which the wind of heaven has dissipated. Then, how suitable to his state of heart the language of this Psalm ! How consoling the assurance that " a broken and contrite heart " is in the sight of God of great price !

But be it remembered that the mere confession of the lips is not the recommendation to Divine compassion of which our text speaks. Its subject is " a broken and contrite *heart*." It is a state of real affliction, of heart-felt self-despair. The general confession of our church may be repeated ; and, in the posture of humiliation before the Lord's Table, the lips may utter the words of contrition,—“The remembrance of sin is grievous to us, and its burden intolerable ;” while the heart remains unbroken, and its self-righteous

texture resists even the most affecting exhibition of redeeming love.

We were further to inquire why a broken and contrite heart is spoken of under the notion of a sacrifice ? The idea seems to have arisen in the writer's mind from the mention of typical sacrifices in the former verse as being unavailable, and unacceptable to God, under the circumstances in which he was placed. With these he contrasts " a broken and a contrite spirit." Did the Psalmist then consider the state of heart which he describes as being of an atoning character, as satisfactory to Divine justice, as propitiatory, and available to a recovery of the favour of God by its own intrinsic worth ? Did he consider it as rendering that sacrifice, of which he speaks in the 40th Psalm and elsewhere, unnecessary ? Oh no : such an interpretation of his words would set the declaration of the text in opposition to the whole tenor of the Divine Record, from the book of Genesis to that of the Revelation of St. John. It would be in unison with the awful error of the Deist and the Socinian, who make repentance a substitute for atonement, and deny the necessity of any proper satisfaction for sin.

But though " a broken and contrite spirit " is not a propitiatory sacrifice for sin, though it can make no atonement for guilt before God ; yet there is a figurative sense in which it is spoken of in our text under the notion of a sacrifice. The

essentials of sacrificature consisted in slaying the victim and offering it to God. Now these essentials are found in “ a broken and contrite heart.” The self-righteous life of the natural heart is therein destroyed, and the heart, thus dead under the sacrificing knife of the Divine law, becomes an oblation to God. It is offered up to Him, not indeed as a propitiation for sin, but to be consecrated thenceforth to His service. It becomes a dedicated thing, “ a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is its reasonable service.”¹ The act of the sacrificer² under the law, in laying his hand on the head of his burnt-offering, acknowledging thereby his desert of death, and transferring his guilt to the victim, was illustrative of this state of heart ; and a profession of faith in the true sacrifice necessarily implies it.

But why, it may be further asked, does the Psalmist use the plural number in the word sacrifices, while the corresponding term “ a broken heart,” is singular ? The reason may perhaps be, that “ a broken and contrite spirit,” relying, as it necessarily does, on the blood of the everlasting covenant, comprehends in its various sensibilities of self-renunciation, faith and gratitude, all that was intended to be represented in the acts of the several kinds of legal sacrificature. The sin-offering, the burnt-offering, the thank-offering,

¹ Rom. xii. 1.

² Lev. i. 3. &c.

are all included, as to the duties of the offerer, in this frame of heart, so that what the scribe said of the love of God, which always accompanies a contrite spirit, may be asserted also respecting the latter, that it “is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.”¹

It is therefore spoken of as “the *sacrifices of God*,”—that which He requires and which He will assuredly accept. It is in unison with the will of God concerning the redemption that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It gives to Him the glory of His own work, and its language is the echo of the voice from heaven which declared, at the baptism of Jesus, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” God has chosen to secure glory to His own perfections by the atoning sufferings and meritorious obedience of His only begotten Son. “A contrite spirit” gives that glory to Him, which the self-righteous heart denies. It is submission “to the righteousness of God.”²

Well, therefore, might the royal penitent express his assurance that “a broken and a contrite heart,” God would “not despise.” By a common figure of speech more is intended than is expressed. Thou wilt assuredly accept it. Thou wilt even take delight in it, as answering the purpose of Thine own grace, and as being the

¹ Mark xii. 33.

² Rom. x. 3.

work of Thine own Spirit—"the new heart and the right spirit," the new creation in Christ Jesus. This then may safely be considered as affording full evidence of an interest in the pardoning mercy which it implores, and of the renovation of soul at which it aims. This is acceptable to God, while no moral virtues, and no profession of faith, can be acceptable without it.

But whence did the Psalmist gather this comforting assurance? From the word of God, from whence only the will of God can be ascertained. The whole prescribed system of sacrifice afforded him instruction on the momentous question, "How shall man be just with God?" and the whole tenor of the book of Job, the earliest book of Divine Revelation, relates to this subject. "I have heard of Thee," says the Divinely instructed patriarch—"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."¹ But how much more full is the evidence afforded to us in the testimony of subsequent prophets, the declarations of our Lord and His inspired Apostles, and the experience of His church, during centuries of grace which have since elapsed! "Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy,—I dwell in the high and holy place:

¹ See the Author's "Patriarchal Theology," vol. i. p. 306, &c.

with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”¹ “Blessed,” said our Lord, “are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”²

Let us inquire if the temper of mind which is spoken of in our text as being, exclusively, acceptable to God, be found *in us*. Without it no religious connexion, profession, or duties, can afford any safe ground of hope for eternity. This is the test of Divine teaching, of interest in the salvation of Christ, and of meetness for the kingdom of God.

¹ Isaiah lvii. 15.

² Matthew v. 3, 4.

PSALM LI. 18, 19.

*Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion, build
Thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt Thou
be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
with burnt offering and whole burnt offering,
then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine
altar.*

IN these concluding verses of the Psalm, its penitent author, having finished his devotional exercises in regard to his own salvation with a declaration of lively hope in Divine mercy, founded, as to its meritorious basis, on the future sacrifice of Christ, and evidentially on the work of the Spirit in his soul; proceeds to a subject which, next to his own restoration to Divine favour, held the liveliest interest in his affections. As in the case of Eli, so in that of David, the fate of the ark of God was a subject of most anxious solicitude. The welfare of the church, in which his own was involved, roused his mind to earnest prayer on its behalf. It is highly probable that he trembled (for what effects may not conscious guilt produce!) lest the promises

made to him in his public character, relative to benefits to be communicated to the church through his instrumentality, and to the advent of the expected Messiah in the line of his family, should be frustrated, or in some way disturbed, by his heinous transgressions. He therefore deprecated this incalculable evil, and implored a continuance and increase of Divine favour to the church of God. He might, moreover, rationally fear lest his example, in the elevated situation in which a gracious Providence had placed him, as a prophet and a king, should prove injurious to the interests of religion, and destructive of practical Godliness among the people immediately committed to his care.

It is the invariable tendency of true religion, under all its outward forms, to destroy the natural selfishness of the human heart, to purify it from its vile affections, and to enlarge the boundary of its sensibilities. In an unregenerate state our emotions of pain or pleasure, of hope or fear, of desire or aversion, are confined within the limits of self-interest : and when these emotions are extended to consanguinity, friendship, and patriotism, or even to a general philanthropy, yet even then they may be traced to a selfish origin : there is nothing in them of disinterested charity. They are also limited in regard to their sphere of action. They are concerned only about the present life, and are unsolicitous about the welfare of the soul

and a life to come. They thus betray the infidel source from which they spring, and the corrupt channel through which they flow.

Our text proves that the heart of David had been purified and enlarged by the grace he had received. The anxiety he felt for his own soul produced a concern for the spiritual benefit of others, not only of those who were his contemporaries in this fallen world, but of his fellow sinners to the latest generations of his species. His fears respecting the result of his crimes, and his earnest prayer for the prevention of such result, may be supposed to have taken this wide and comprehensive range.

The same effect has been produced by the same cause under every dispensation of religion, and in every individual instance of vital Godliness. Disinterested love, whether it be the sympathy of affection which prevails among the members of Christ's mystical body, or commiseration for those who are disunited from it, is "the mind of Christ," introduced by grace into a fallen soul—the mind of Him, "who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be made rich."¹ True religion is a reprint of the Divine law, in both its branches, on the regenerate heart: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and

¹ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

strength, and thy neighbour as thyself.” “Faith worketh by love.” “This is God’s commandment, that we believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as He gave us commandment.”¹ These are correlatives, and necessarily co-existent. Charity, the regenerate principle, the essence of all religion, has its gradations of regard. Its primary and supreme object is God. It next seeks the happiness of the soul in which it exists and is operative. Thou shalt love thy neighbour *as thyself*. It is selfish; but not exclusively selfish: self-interest is not its boundary line. The church and the world are comprehended in its embrace. The spiritual welfare of every human being is an object of its solicitude.

This enlargement of heart is inseparable from true Godliness. Its manifestation depends, indeed,

¹ 1 John iii. 23. May not St. John, in this twofold representation of Christian duty (for obedience to a commandment is a duty) have had in his view the twofold requisition of the Divine law, as constituting the subjects of the two tables [of stone, on which it was inscribed by the finger of God? Justification by a personal fulfilment of the law is unattainable by a fallen and sinful creature. But when he embraces by faith the Saviour who has fulfilled it for him, the law is fulfilled *in him* both in its precept and penalty. Rom. viii. 4. This faith is the germ of rekindled love to God; and “he who loveth God” must “love his brother also.” Thus the covenant of works and the covenant of grace converge to one focus, the glory of God manifested in the happiness of His creatures which happiness can arise only from the principle of love. “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.” 1 John iv. 16.

on a variety of circumstances. Its holy solicitude may be limited by want of information respecting the state of the church and the world, and its energies contracted by want of power; but the Redeemer's glory, and the salvation of souls redeemed by His blood, must have a place in every bosom where the preciousness of Christ as a personal Saviour is felt, and where the value of the soul, as an inference from the price paid for its redemption, has been felt also.

Such were the feelings which we attribute to the Psalmist when he gave utterance to the two last verses of our Psalm. His anxieties were roused to an unusual degree of energy by the remembrance of his grievous fall. He was agonised by the thought, that his sins might prove injurious to the cause and people of God. Perhaps, one of his chief comforts in the state of happiness may arise, and will for ever arise, from knowing that his recorded repentance, the testimony of God's mercy to him borne in this Psalm, has been made eminently useful to the souls of men through successive generations.

We return from this digression to a more particular consideration of the text, which will conclude the course of lectures in which we have been engaged. These concluding verses contain,

1. AN ACT OF GENERAL INTERCESSION.

2. THE ANTICIPATED EFFECT OF ITS ACCEPTANCE. We consider—

1. THE INTERCESSION OF OUR TEXT.

In discussing this branch of our subject, we shall review this intercession as it proceeded from the heart and pen of the royal penitent, and as it proceeds from the heart and lips of every penitent sinner.

The prayer of the text, as used by David, may be considered to have had a literal, a spiritual, and a prophetic sense. It probably referred to his own time, to all future periods of time, and particularly to the era of the restoration of his people in the last days.

It has been maintained that, as Jerusalem was a fortified place before the time of David, the prayer of our text affords proof that this Psalm was not written by him ; or, if written by him, that it can have no relation to the personal event spoken of in its title, but must refer exclusively to a prophetic and distantly prospective period.¹

¹ The opinion of Bishop Horsley, which was adverted to in the commencement of these lectures, and in the lecture on the 4th verse, is expressed as follows :—"That this Psalm was not written upon the occasion to which the title refers, is evident from the 4th and 18th verses. The 4th verse ill suits the case of David, who laid a successful plot against Uriah's life, after he had defiled his bed ; and the 18th verse refers the Psalm to the times of the captivity, when Jerusalem lay in ruins." The Bishop therefore entitles the Psalm, "THE PENITENTIAL CONFESSION OF THE CONVERTED JEWS." The 4th verse we have already considered ; and probably neither that, nor the verse now under our consideration, will be considered by the reader as a sufficient ground of objection to an interpretation which is sanctioned by a title, uninspired

But though Jerusalem was a fortified place before the time of David, we have historic evidence that its fortifications were not considered as complete, that David added to their security, and that they were not finished till the days of Solomon.¹ Besides this, there can be no impropriety in contemplating the walls of the future Temple, for the erection of which David had been directed by God to make preparation, as included among "the walls of Jerusalem," which he besought God to build by employing such instrumentality as He might see fit to use. This was the chief glory of the city, as being the type of the body of Christ, and the grand medium for the time being, of promised blessing to the church; it was connected with all the "good" which God had engaged to "do to Zion." Therein the "good pleasure" of Jehovah towards His church was to be manifested, till it was transferred to the great antitype which the temple prefigured. The primary object then of David's prayer might be a literal completion of those fortifications of Jerusalem which he had begun, and the erection of

indeed, but conveying to us the judgment of all antiquity, and which so exactly corresponds with the feelings which may be supposed to have occupied the heart of David, and with those of every penitent sinner. The ground of opposition to such evidence ought to be very strong. Perhaps, if the learned prelate had revised his excellent notes previously to their publication, he would have erased that on this Psalm which I have copied above.

¹ See 2 Sam. v. 7—9. 1 Kings iii. 1. xi. 27.

the Temple, its chief defence and ornament, for which he had been commanded to prepare.

But I cannot be persuaded that the views of the prophetic author of this Psalm, in this act of intercession, are to be confined to a material building, a temporal economy, and worldly prosperity ; or to his own period. I conceive that his mind, to which the prophetic spirit had been restored, here as elsewhere grasped a long futurity of spiritual blessing, and that his prayer comprehended the church of Christ through all its dispensations and generations. That the names of the ancient church, “ Zion ” and “ Jerusalem,” are employed in this comprehensive sense, cannot be denied. As instances, we may refer to the Epistle to the Galatians, that to the Hebrews, and the Revelation of St. John.¹ The prayer of David then has, in a spiritual sense, been heard and answered. The request it makes has been, from his era to our own, in a course of fulfilment, is still fulfilling, and will assuredly be fulfilled in the utmost import which can be assigned to it. God has built the walls of Jerusalem, and has been Himself a “ wall of fire round about ” His Church, “ and the glory in the midst of her.” He is daily adding living stones to that Temple which is indestructible and eternal. He will put on it “ the top stone, with shoutings, Grace, Grace, unto it.”

¹ Gal. iv. 25, 26. Heb xii. 22. Rev. xxi. 10

Similar to the feelings of David, discovered in the act of intercession in our text, are the feelings of every one who possesses like precious faith. The diffusion of the true religion in its vitality and power ; and as connected with it, the glory of his Saviour and the salvation of his fellow sinners ; lie near his heart. He must long to see the saving knowledge of God communicated to his own family, his neighbours, his countrymen, and throughout the world. In this respect he feels himself akin to the whole human race. Every member of the great family, scattered over the surface of the world, is his brother or his sister. The sympathies of his charity extend to all, He must therefore be the friend of every institution which has the spiritual and eternal welfare of mankind for its object. He will indeed seek the promotion of that object through the channel which approves itself the most to his judgment ; but every penitent sinner must have the object at heart, and endeavour to promote it, by his prayers, his personal efforts, and whatever talents of mind, body, or estate, God may have entrusted to him. The subject affords a fair test of personal religion, of the vitality of our profession. Every genuine subject of the Redeemer's kingdom must be anxious to promote the honour of His crown, and must sympathize with the wants and miseries of his fellow sinners,

We have ventured to ascribe a more direct prophetic character to the intercession of our text, and to refer it, in its ulterior import, to a specific period in the history of the church. What should hinder us from comprehending Bp. Horsley's view of the subject in our interpretation of David's prayer? Why may we not suppose his prophetic mind to have grasped "the latter day-glory" of Jerusalem, and to have looked forward to the time, of which he so often speaks in other Psalms,¹ when Mount Zion shall again become the principal seat of Divine worship, and Jerusalem be restored from the desolations of many generations? ² An ancient Jewish Rabbi, the

¹ See the series of prophetic Psalms, from the 95th to the 100th, which, from St. Paul's use of one of them in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, Bp. Horsley considers as one prophetic poem, and entitles THE INTRODUCTION OF THE FIRST BEGOTTEN INTO THE WORLD.

² Notwithstanding the general current of interpretation is against me, I cannot satisfy myself with assigning a meaning exclusively historical, or one that is merely spiritual, to the latter chapters of the prophecy of Ezekiel, which contain an account of a city and temple which were exhibited in vision to the prophet's mind. The description does not correspond in its dimensions either with the Temple of Solomon or with the second temple. And surely such a minuteness as the vision displays, is not to be accounted for by a mere symbolic allusion to the Church of God in the future Gospel-day. There is nothing of impossibility in the dimensions of this visionary city and temple; and the expectation of a literal fabric, being raised at the time of the restoration of Israel to their own land, may be abundantly justified, as I conceive, by other prophecies of the Old Testament.

celebrated David Kimshi, took this prophetic view of the psalmist's prayer. He supposes that the royal penitent, having recovered the spirit of prophecy, foresaw the destruction of the first and second temples, and the interruption of the appointed sacrifices, in consequence of the sins of Israel ; and that his eye penetrated to that period when, the Messiah having appeared, acceptable sacrifice should be again offered in Jerusalem to the Lord God of Israel.

Before we proceed to the second division of the text, let us again advert to its language of intercession as adapted to the use of the Christian Church. The nation of Israel was for many centuries the church of the living God, and its capital, Jerusalem, seated on Mount Zion, the Divinely chosen seat of the worship of its God. This favoured nation, descended from Abraham "the friend of God," has for a long period of time been scattered over the face of the earth, and its capital and temple laid in ruins. Prophecy has, however, assured us that this people will be re-collected, and again grafted "into their own olive Tree, when "the Deliverer shall come out of Zion, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob."¹ In the interval God has had His church in the world, collected from among the Gentiles, who have been admitted to the high

¹ Romans xi. 24, 25.

privilege, before enjoyed by Israel, of being the people of God. The New Testament church has resembled the ancient church, among other respects, in this especially, its separation from the world. There has been, and there is, an external inclosure, dividing the visible church from Jews, Mahometans, and Pagans ; and there is an inclosure, within the outer circle, dividing the spiritual and invisible church from those who possess indeed the name, but have not the essence of Christianity.

Now conversion, or “repentance towards God,” is a transition from the state of nature into the state of grace ; a transition, not merely from the uninclosed wilderness into the inclosure of the visible church, but also from the outer into the inner circle of that church. A true penitent is brought into a new society. He is “come unto mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem : to an innumerable company of angels, and to the church of the first-born who are written in heaven : and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect ; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Testament, whose blood speaketh better things than that of Abel.”¹ He has new interests, new associations, new principles, and new feelings adapted to them. Before, he lived for himself

¹ Heb. xii. 22. &c.

and the present evil world : he is, now, a living member of the church and family of God, and is deeply concerned for its prosperity.

The prayer of our text must therefore, in its spiritual application, be the prayer of every true penitent. We often use similar petitions in our Liturgy, our public worship being thereby constituted a missionary prayer-meeting.¹ A genuine member of our own church, whose sympathies are in unison with the devotional exercises in which he continually joins, feels the spiritual welfare of his own family, his own parish, his own country, of Christendom, and of the world, to be an object nearer his heart than any secular and transitory benefit. Blessed be God that the duty of intercession is better understood, and more generally and consistently practised, than it has been in former days. The members of our church are more alive to their obligation and privilege, as members of the universal church. But still the subject ought to be continually impressed on the

¹ See the Collects for Good Friday, the first relating to ourselves, the congregation then assembled, under the notion of the family of God,—the second to the whole body of the church,—and the third to the world without, under the divisions of “Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics.” See also the “Prayer for all conditions of men,” and the Litany—“That it may please Thee to rule and govern Thy holy church universal in the right way”—“That it may please Thee to have mercy upon all men.”

consciences of all who profess to believe that there is “one body, and one spirit, one hope of” the heavenly “calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in them all.”

We now proceed to consider—

2. THE EFFECT ANTICIPATED IN THE SUCCESS OF THE PENITENT PSALMIST'S INTERCESSION, which is the subject of the last verse of the Psalm. *Then*, (when Thou shalt have built the walls of Jerusalem) *Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering; then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar.*”

The connexion between the two verses of our text, formed by the inferential particle “then,” intimates clearly that the walls of the future Temple are to be included among “the walls of Jerusalem,” which God is implored to build, if they be not chiefly or even exclusively intended. For it was in the temple that “the sacrifices of righteousness” were to be offered: therein was the altar of God to be erected, on which the burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering were in future to be laid. “There shall be a place,” said Moses,¹ “which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there, thither shall ye bring all

¹ Deut. xii. 11.

that I command you, your burnt-offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave-offerings of your land, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord." Is not the connexion of the two verses evidently this? 'when Thou shalt have pardoned my sin, and thus have removed the just cause of Thy indignation against my people which I have given; when Thou shalt, according to Thy gracious promise, have done good to Zion, by building Thy Temple in it; then will Thy worship be conducted there in an acceptable manner, in a manner more suitable to Thy Divine Majesty than is possible while the ark remains in a private dwelling place; then wilt Thou afford evidence that Thou art pleased with the burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering: then shall Thy people rejoice in Thee.' ¹

May we not suppose that the royal suppliant here glances at a contrast between the sacrifices of penitence, which he calls "sacrifices of righteousness," or such sacrifices as God required, "the broken and contrite heart," which he had spoken of in verse 17, as being acceptable to God—sacrifices offered with right motives and to right ends—and those formal and hypocritical sacrifices which, doubtless, he had continued to offer during his state of impenitence, and which, he might well fear, that his people, led by his sad ex-

¹ Comp. 1 Kings viii.

ample, too genenerally offered? Such a contrast every genuine penitent is forced to make between the worship of an unregenerate state and the broken spirit which God accepts. He has learned that “the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is His delight.”¹

“Sacrifices of righteousness”² are, generally, such sacrifices as God had appointed and promised to accept. Such, for the time being, were the typical sacrifices of the levitical dispensation, when offered according to the Divine institution, and in a right temper of mind. Such, in a far higher sense, as that to which all previous sacrifice had a prospect of reference, is the sacrifice of Christ, “the sacrifice and offering for a sweet smelling savour,” as St. Paul describes it.³ Strictly speaking, this alone is the sacrifice of righteousness or of justice, that which justice demanded, and with which it could be satisfied. The sacrifices of the levitical institute were only shadows of this, and derived

¹ Proverbs xv. 8. xxi. 27. The contrast between the wicked and the upright in this text, recalls to mind the evangelical axiom of the prophet Habakkuk, often quoted and applied in the New Testament, “Behold, his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.” Chapter ii. 4. Compare Romans i. 17. Galatians iii. 11. Hebrews x. 38.

² See Psalm iv. 6.

³ Ephesians v. 2, alluding to Genesis viii. 21.

all their claim to righteousness from it. This, exclusively, has glorified the Divine perfections, and honoured the law of God by meeting its claim, both of the obedience it demands and the penalty for disobedience which it exacts. But, in a subordinate and subservient sense, “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.” The offering of the penitent believer, that of a contrite heart, is in the sight of God of great price ; not, however, from any intrinsic value in the sacrifice, but from its relation to the one propitiatory sacrifice of the Son of God.

Perhaps by the “burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering,” mentioned in our text, David who, in another Psalm,¹ introduces the Lord Christ, addressing His Father, and proposing Himself as the antitype of legal offerings, might ultimately refer to “the offering of the body of Christ once for all.” The *whole* burnt-offering might be rendered the *perfect* burnt-offering. In its levitical sense it means the offering which was wholly consumed upon the altar by fire, and as such had a special reference to the offering of Christ. If the prophetic author saw the day of Christ and spake of it in writing one of his Psalms, (not to say many of them) no reason can be given to disprove an allusion to the sacrifice of Christ in the words of our text.

¹ Psalm xl. 6, 7, 8. Compare Hebrews x. 5.

It is added “then shall they offer bullocks (or, rather, young bullocks) upon thine altar. A bullock was the appointed victim in many of the specified sacrifices of the law, if the offerer could afford to bring it. It may be supposed that the offerings referred to were what the law denominates thank-offerings, offerings indicative of devout acknowledgment for mercies received. What was intended by this species of offering we learn from another prophet of the Old Testament dispensation, and an Apostle of the New. The Prophet Hosea,¹ speaking of the final conversion of Israel, has prepared for their use an act of solemn worship: “Take with you words, and return unto the Lord,—say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, so will we render unto Thee the *calves of our lips*” The thank-offering is, in its antitypical import, the calves of the lips. Penitent believers in Christ are “an holy Priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”² These are the daily sacrifices of the Christian church, the sacrifices of the broken spirit. The thank-offering finds its counterpart in the Lord’s supper, as its name, the eucharist implies. Herein the communicant feasts on His sacrifice, and blesses its gracious Author. It is a “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.”

¹ Chapter xiv. 2.

² 1 Peter ii. 5. See also Romans xii. 1, and Hebrews xiii. 15.

Therein we offer unto God “ourselves, our souls, and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto Him,” which we beseech Him “to accept, not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences through Jesus Christ our Lord.”¹

Such is the extent of supplication which may be included in the Psalmist’s notation of time. “*Then* shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness”—“*Then*,” when Thou hast heard my prayer,—when Thy Temple shall be built, and Thy appointed worship shall be there performed. But all this is figurative and prelusive. “*Then*” shalt Thou indeed “be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering,” when Thy Son, the promised Saviour, shall have appeared, and shall have fulfilled in His own person, and in the sacrifice of Himself, all that the long train of antecedent shadows had foreshown concerning Him. “*Then*,” through a long succession of years, while myriads of redeemed sinners shall offer at the foot of the cross the thank-offering of a broken and grateful heart, —while the Redeemer daily sees of the travail of his soul,—while angels rejoice over repenting sinners,—“*then* shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness.” And more especially, when Thine ancient people, who are still beloved

¹ The first Collect in the post-Communion Service.

for their father's sake, shall "look unto Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and as one that is in bitterness for his first born"—and when the heathen shall be given to thy Son for His inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession;—when, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, Thy name shall be known and adored;—when the spiritual Temple, built by Thine own Almighty hands, shall receive its last living stone, with shoutings, "Grace, Grace, unto it;" "*Then* shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness," while the great multitude which no man can number offer the calves of their lips for ever and ever.

Let the believer consider the encouragement given him to be instant in offering the Psalmist's prayer: "Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build Thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering; then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar." The encouragement arises from these considerations, that this prayer was dictated by the Spirit of grace and supplication, that God in its accomplishment has involved the manifestation of His own glory with the happiness of His creatures, and that the prayer is the echo of His intercession

who cannot ask in vain: "Father, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee." Oh! let us urge the petition by these arguments. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven;" "for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever." The present moment calls for redoubled earnestness in prayer and exertion. The dawn of the morn of glory has broken on us. Let us hail and accelerate its approach.

But can we cordially unite with the church of God in its daily prayer, and say "Thy kingdom come?" No one who is not a sincere penitent can do so. Are we such? No inquiry we can make is of equal importance. Let the model afforded by the son of Jesse be our test.

Let us consider the honour and privilege of being members of that society which is separated in mind and spirit from the world that lieth under the dominion of the wicked one.¹ What have we to do with that world, but to pray for its conversion, and try to do it good? What interest have we in its riches, pleasures, and honours? What are its learning, its arts and sciences to us, but as they may be made subservient to the "one thing

¹ 1 John v. 19.

needful ? ” May “ our conversation ” be “ in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself.”

PERSONAL ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

NOT ESSENTIAL TO

SAVING FAITH :

THE

SUBSTANCE OF A DISCOURSE.

DELIVERED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF SAINT JAMES, BRISTOL.

HEBREWS XI. 1.

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen.*

THE connexion of the words now recited, and that of the chapter from which they are taken, with the general object of St. Paul in this epistle to the Hebrews, and more particularly with the concluding part of the preceding chapter, must be evident on a cursory inspection. The believing Hebrews, for whose benefit the epistle was written, were subjected to very severe trials of their faith and hope. These arose, partly, from their own long-rooted prepossession in favour of the Mosaical institution, which had been confessedly derived from divine authority, and for many centuries the recognised religion of the church of God. The prejudices of their own minds, founded as they appeared to be on the authority of God Himself, were strengthened by the opposition which the Gospel of Christ, as superseding the law of Moses, received from the unconverted Jews, its bitterest opponents, who, not satisfied with assaults on the faith of their believing bre-

thren by the force of argument, had recourse to the violence of actual persecution by means of the civil power. How great the sufferings of the faithful in the cause of the Gospel had been, may be gathered from the Apostle's commendation of their past steadfastness in maintaining their profession. With the intention of encouraging them to a perseverance in their holy warfare, he exhorts them to "call to remembrance the former days, in which, after they had been illuminated," or brought into the light of the Gospel, "they endured a great fight of afflictions, partly whilst they were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly whilst they became companions of them who were so used, For" (he adds) "ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better, and an enduring substance." But it was now become necessary to exhort them to "hold fast their confidence," and to assure them that it had in prospect a "great recompence of reward."

Having spoken, in the 38th verse of the former chapter, by a quotation from the Prophet Habakkuk,¹ of the only means by which a justified sinner can maintain his ground, namely, by faith; the Apostle proceeds in our text to define what

¹ Chap. ii. 4.

that faith is, by which a believer is supported in spiritual life, and then, throughout the chapter, to illustrate the effects of faith by examples chiefly drawn from the scriptures of the Old Testament. He knew that exemplification has a more powerful influence on the mind than mere exhortation ; since the former, by showing what has been accomplished, demonstrates the possibility of surmounting similar difficulties by the same means. By exhibiting therefore to their view former results of faith among their revered ancestors, he proved to them its efficacy for their own support under their present afflictions.

The words of our text, then, contain a definition of faith ; and as the subject is one of definition, I shall perhaps be forgiven, if I occupy more of your time in logical distinctions than I am accustomed to do. I shall not, however, forget that, “ as face answereth to face in a glass, so does the heart of man to man ;” or, that our own experience is to be brought to the test of scripture, and that scripture may be illustrated by our own experience.

The words of our text will lead us to consider two things—

FIRST—THE SUBJECT OF THE APOSTLE’S DEFINITION, *viz.* FAITH—and

SECONDLY—HIS DEFINITION ITSELF.

May the Holy Spirit lead us into all truth ; and guard us from all error, in whatever subtle

shape it may appear ! And may our minds be brought into a saving acquaintance with that wonderful principle of moral action to which our text relates.

We are to consider—

FIRST—THE SUBJECT OF THE APOSTLE'S DEFINITION, *viz.* “ FAITH.”

The importance of this word may be inferred from its frequent occurrence in the Holy Scriptures ; and the importance there ascribed to it must lead us to an anxious desire of obtaining an accurate acquaintance with its meaning. You will recollect that faith is spoken of in connexion with the manifestative glory of God : it is the appointed means of its manifestation. We read of the father of the faithful, Abraham, that, “ being strong in faith, he gave glory to God.”¹ Now the importance of that which gives glory to God, is unquestionable ; and this is attributed to faith. Moreover, the salvation of sinners is ascribed to faith, as the instrument by which only it can be attained. It is faith which brings us into union and communion with the adorable Author of that salvation ; for it is written, “ He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.”² Oh ! then, of how great importance must it be to have an acquaintance with the nature of this “ precious

¹ Rom. iv. 20.

² Mark xxi. 16.

faith,"—to be in possession of that grace, on the exercise of which depends everlasting salvation, and the want of which ensures everlasting condemnation ! Be it remembered that the scripture hath suspended, exclusively and inclusively, the pardon of sin, the justification, the sanctification, and the glorification, of the fallen soul of man, on the possession of faith. "He who hath the Son," or who believeth on Him, "hath life ; and he who hath not the Son of God, hath not life."¹

I have made these remarks on the importance of faith for the purpose of securing your earnest attention to the interesting subject which I have brought before you, viz. the Apostle's definition of faith. The world wonders that we speak so often of faith, and are ready to conclude, because we talk so much about it, that we exclude from our creed the doctrine of good works. But it is not so. We feel indeed the necessity of laying a solid foundation, before we endeavour to erect the indispensable superstructure which it is to support. Faith in Christ, or rather Christ Himself, is the foundation of all hope towards God, and of all conformity to His will, both in heart and life ; so that "without faith it is impossible to please God," and no one who is not a partaker of faith in Christ, can perform any act that is acceptable to Him.²

¹ 1 John v. 12.

² XXXIX Articles. Art. 9.

Before I call your attention to the Apostle's definition of faith, allow me to claim it for a short time, while I make a few remarks on the general nature of this act of the mind, without referring, at present, to its objects,—whether earthly, or heavenly,—temporal, or spiritual and eternal ;—and without regarding the distinction between a merely human and a Divine faith. Belief may be exercised as the result of our reasoning faculties on subjects which are within their grasp ; or, it may be the effect of Divine influence on the heart, respecting things which are beyond the reach of unassisted reason. Speaking, then, of faith or belief, in its general acceptation, what is its import ? It is credit given to testimony—an assent to the truth of any information which is proposed to the reception or rejection of the mind. The information proposed to our belief may relate to things that are past, present, or future, if the existing objects are not cognizable by our natural senses. Nothing that is subject to our senses is the object of faith. This corresponds with the definition furnished by the judicious Hooker, who says, “The name of faith being properly and strictly taken, it must need have reference *to some uttered word*, as the object of belief.” Our Apostle states this distinction when he says to the Corinthians, “We walk by faith, not by sight ;”¹ and again, “that which a man

¹ 2 Cor. v. 7.

seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"¹ When I see the sun shining in its meridian strength, my conviction that it does shine, is not to be called faith; it arises from the evidence of my senses. But when I am informed that the sun shone in like manner a century ago, my persuasion that it did so shine is faith—it depends on credible testimony. That I am now speaking to you, is not the subject of belief; you ascertain that I am by the evidence of your eyes and ears; but that there once lived such a man as Cyrus, or Cæsar, or Alexander, is a subject for faith, because all we can know about them, arises from the report of others in historic records.

It must follow that the degree of credit which the mind gives to any record, will depend on the estimate which is formed of the veracity of the witness or record. Hence, in human testimony, when matters of moment are at issue, the witness is sworn to speak "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;" and "an oath for confirmation is an end of all strife."

Let us now apply these general remarks on the nature of belief to that faith which relates to the eternal realities of the unseen world, and which is declared to be "of the operation of God"² in the human heart. Its objects differ widely from

¹ Rom. viii. 24. See also 2 Cor. iv. 18, where the objects of faith are spoken of as things "unseen and eternal."

² Colossians ii. 12.

those of human faith, and it has a higher source than our own reasoning faculties. But it is, like a merely human belief, credit given to testimony,—the record contained in the scriptures,—the word of God. It embraces “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” which is attested by the “two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie.”¹ Generally, all that is revealed by Him is the object of faith; but, specially, it regards the Gospel, the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel-Revelation consists, primarily, of those *facts* of which a summary is comprehended in the Apostles’ Creed, such as the incarnation, sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. In this manner St. Paul defines the Gospel which he preached at Corinth.² But it also includes those *inferences* from these facts, which are drawn by the Spirit of God in the same inspired Record, such as that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth,” or hath virtue to cleanse, “from all sin;”³ and that “He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him.”⁴ The facts, and the inferences drawn from them in the volume of inspiration, are equally objects of faith, because they are supported by one and the same authority, viz. the authority of God Himself.

¹ Heb. vi. 18.

³ 1 John i. 7.

² 1 Cor. xv. 1, &c.

⁴ Heb. vii. 25.

But as nothing can be the object of Divine faith but that which is revealed in the scriptures ; and as it is not there revealed that I, individually, am a pardoned and justified person ; that I am so, cannot be an object of faith : consequently we never find a persuasion of personal salvation spoken of under the notion of faith. Faith, according to Hooker's definition before quoted, " must needs have reference to some uttered word as its object." ¹

What then is the blessed persuasion of a personal interest in the promises of God, which it is the privilege of believers to seek with all earnestness, and, when attained, to keep and cultivate

¹ Is there a single confession of faith to be found in the New Testament, that expresses an assurance of personal salvation ? Do not such confessions, like the symbols of our church, run in general terms relating to the Person and Work of Christ ? And are not the persons, who make such confessions, spoken of as true believers ? Of this kind was the confession of Peter, which called forth his Divine Master's approbation. Peter said, " Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." On which our Lord pronounced him blessed, and assured him that flesh and blood had not revealed this to him, but His Father which is in heaven. Matt. xvi. 16, 17. So, in reply to the Ethiopian Eunuch's request to be baptised, Philip said, " If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Acts viii. 37. This answer Philip considered a sufficient warrant for admitting him to baptism. Comp. John vi. 69. 1 John v. 1, 5, 10. &c. &c.

It may, further be remarked that forgiveness of sins, and justification unto life eternal, are spoken of as *consequences* of

with all the energies of their souls? It is not faith; it is rather one of the fruits of faith. But as such an inference drawn from the facts of the Gospel, and, from inspired comments on those facts, is a deduction which is dependant on the use of our reasoning faculties, when brought under the influence of the word and Spirit of God, or what we call conscience, which is mind acting on itself; those facts and comments may be firmly believed on the authority of God, not only as being true, but also as involving in themselves the sinner's only hope of salvation, while the mind hesitates about the inference to be derived from them in respect to its own safety. I may be assured, from philosophical principles and the testimony of others, that the rays of the sun falling on a dark cloud, must produce and exhibit to the eye the prismatic colours of the rainbow; while I may doubt whether I am in a proper position to see that token of God's Covenant with Noah and his posterity. And though I may myself have seen the rainbow, a

faith in the Lord Jesus, and therefore a personal participation of these blessings cannot be the direct object of faith. "Repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ *for* the remission of sins, &c." Acts ii. 38. "that your sins *may be* blotted out." (εἰς τὸ) ch. iii. 19. See chap. x. 43. "Whosoever believeth *shall* receive &c." "All that believe are justified," xiii. 39. Can this mean that all who are assured of being justified are justified? or that an assurance of being actually and already justified is essential to the being justified?

change of position may remove it from my sight, while the bow itself continues to be distinctly visible to others.

So far then from an assurance of personal salvation being of the essence of faith, or indispensable to safety, it may be justly questioned whether it be faith at all ; or whether it is not rather to be considered as a result of faith, a fruit of that tree of which faith is the stem, and grace the sap ; for faith must have the word of God for its warrant. I may believe, giving full credit to the word of God, that Christ has made an allsufficient atonement for sin, and is therefore “ able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him,”¹ and that he will reject no one who truly comes to Him ;² while I, nevertheless, doubt whether I have, individually, so come to Him as to secure an interest in His atoning sacrifice. The former, described as faith *in Christ*, or faith *in the righteousness of God*, is that act or state of mind and heart, to which salvation is annexed in scripture, and it produces, as ten thousand instances might be brought forward to prove, the first fruits of salvation, those effects which a saving faith alone can produce, such as a broken and contrite spirit, alienation from this present evil world, self-annihilation, desire after communion with God, zeal for the

¹ Heb. vii. 25.

² John vi. 37.

promotion of His glory, and all the other evidences of a regenerate state.

Let us exemplify this by a scriptural anecdote, employed by our Lord to illustrate the salvation of a sinner by faith in Himself. The Israelites in the Wilderness were bitten by fiery flying serpents, and many among them died in consequence of the poison thus communicated. The survivors were directed by a Divine revelation to look to a brazen effigy which Moses, by the appointment of God, raised on a pole in the view of the whole camp. To a compliance with the Divine injunction that they should turn their eyes towards this symbolic effigy, a cure was promised. This look of desire and hope is made by our Lord to correspond with the act of faith in his atoning cross, with which act He connects, exclusively and inclusively, the attainment of everlasting life. But can it be supposed by any one, that every Israelite who looked, and by looking obtained a cure, was *assured* beforehand that he should obtain it? Is it not more than probable, from the circumstances of the case, that many shades of expectation accompanied the act of obedience; and that in few, if in any instances, was it the certainty of expectation? Yet in every instance of obedience a cure followed. The look implied despair of other help, and a hope, stronger or weaker, of relief from the sight of the Divine ordinance, however dis-

tant its position, or indistinct the view of it,—however far advanced the disease, or enfeebled the power of vision. The obedience, and not the assurance of faith, is the saving principle ; and salvation arises, not from the strength or natural operation of that principle, but from the saving efficacy of its object. A trembling hand may lift the healing draught, and the lip may quiver that receives it ; but the power of the medicine is not thereby diminished. The failure of obtaining salvation results, not from weakness in the obedience of faith, but from a rejection of the remedy. The children of *unbelief*, stigmatised in scripture, are children of *disobedience*. It is pride of heart, and neglect of Christ, and not the vacillations of hope, which exclude from the kingdom of God.¹

Is there a single sentence in the scriptures,

¹ John iii. 18—20. The word *απιστία* “unbelief, is sometimes taken for weak faith, as in Mark ix. 24; but generally it is taken for a privation and utter want of faith.” *Cruiken.* *Απειθεία* is, I believe, never used in the former sense. Abraham doubted, but he did not disbelieve. “He staggered not at the promise” through (*απειθεία*) infidelity. He clung in affection to the promised blessing, though he, at one time, doubted the possibility of its being attained. Gen. xvii. 17. “To that of Abraham, *He did not doubt* ; I answer, that this negation doth not exclude all fear, all doubting, but only that which cannot stand with true faith. It freeth Abraham from doubting through infidelity, not from doubting through infirmity : from the doubting of unbelievers, not of weak believers.”—*Hooker's Sermon on the certainty and perpetuity of faith in the elect.*

which can be construed with fairness so as to make an assurance of a personal interest in Christ necessary to a justified and safe state? I know of none. But if justification were limited to an assurance of being justified, surely we might reasonably expect to find the connexion frequently insisted on. That connexion would, had it any existence, be too important to be left even to a few passages for its support. The very expression, "the assurance of faith," to the cultivation of which St. Paul *exhorts believers*, implies that faith may exist without assurance; and it would, if faith were assurance, be absurd, as it must then be interpreted the assurance of assurance. Certainty admits of no gradations: uncertainty may be graduated downwards till it verges on certainty: as the spirit in a thermometer may sink till it becomes fixed and immoveable.

But while I know of no text which identifies faith and assurance, there are many which appear to me to negative that identity.¹ The second

¹ If faith and assurance be synonymous; or, in other words, if to believe in Christ, and to be assured of a personal interest in Him, be of the same import; then the terms must be interchangeable, so that the one may be substituted for the other without destroying or disturbing the sense of the connexion, in which either of them is introduced. Let us make the experiment, and see how it will answer. St. Paul, and his companion Silas, when imprisoned at Philippi, exhorted the Jailor, as yet confessedly ignorant of Christ, unbelieving, and consequently unjustified, to believe in the Lord Jesus, that is, to believe that he *was* justified!

Epistle of St. Peter was written to persons, who had obtained precious faith in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Yet he exhorts them to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure."¹ Had they been fully assured, would this exhortation have been needful?

The notion that faith and assurance are to be identified, or, in other words, that, unless a man be assured of his own salvation, he is in an unjustified and unsanctified state, is calculated to distress those whom God would have comforted. It must have a tendency to make the heart of the righteous sad, whom God has not made sad; and to strengthen the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life.² That the notion has a tendency to produce the former of these effects will be evident, if we consider how few among those persons who are awakened to a consciousness of their sinfulness and guilt, by nature and by practice, will venture to say that they are sure of their being justified. Are, then, the broken and contrite in heart, the mourners in Zion, the self-despairing sinners, who are looking to the cross of Christ as

Again, our Apostle says, in his Epistle to the Galatians, "we who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, even we have believed in Jesus Christ," that is, were assured of our justification, "that" (*να*, to the end that) we might be justified by the faith of Christ!!" A hundred similar examples of the distinction between faith and assurance might easily be produced.

¹ 2 Peter i. 10.

² Ezekiel xiii. 22.

their only refuge,—are these to be told that they have no interest in redeeming mercy, because either the timidity of their own spirits, or some satanic temptation, or even an imperfect view of the Gospel-salvation, keeps them from saying, in the full confidence of believing, “My Beloved is mine, and I am His?” Surely, spiritual *desires*, kindled in the heart, after the knowledge of Christ and an interest in His grace, afford full proof that spiritual life has been imparted to the soul, or, in other words, of its regenerate state. Among the scriptural indications of such a state, the acts of desiring, seeking, hoping in God’s mercy, are frequently found. It is the characteristic of the justified that they are “looking unto Jesus;”¹ and that look is, in its result, salvation.

“The full assurance of faith,” to the cultivation of which the Apostle exhorts the believing Hebrews,—if this phrase be understood as importing an assurance of personal salvation, adds nothing to the safety of the believer’s state. It is, indeed, connected with his comfort, but not with his security. Does the drowning wretch, who has laid hold of a strong rope, whereby his friends are drawing him to the shore, either strengthen the rope, or nerve the arms of his friends, by a persuasion in his own mind that the

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

effort will succeed? Or, does he weaken the one or the other by his hesitation about the success of that effort? A sense of danger, a love of life, and a hope of saving it, are necessary to his acquiescence in the means employed; and these constitute faith. An affirmative answer to the question (John v. 6.) “Wilt thou be made whole,” is the pre-requisite to a cure.

The notion which disclaims all evidence of a regenerate state, besides the mere persuasion that I am justified, and therefore regenerated by the Spirit of God, is full of danger to the souls of men in another point of view. For it must lead many to persuade themselves of safety on very insufficient grounds. If no consciousness of sin, in its guilt and pollution, be necessary as a preparative to faith in Christ, or as an accompaniment to the exercise of faith in Him; if it be sufficient to *believe* that I am a sinner, because the word of God has said that I am such;¹ if “repentance in dust and ashes,” the inseparable companion of true faith, do not imply contrition of soul before God; the narrow way must be widened beyond its scriptural boundary. Surely, the exclusion of all tests of state and character,

¹ The sinfulness of nature is not an object of *belief* to the heart that is awakened to spiritual feeling; it is a matter of consciousness. In this every believer is, indeed, assured so as to be freed from all doubt.

with respect to the possession or destitution of regenerating grace, is unscriptural and perilous. The first Epistle of St. John is a treatise on the evidences of a renewed state of soul. In any other view it is unintelligible. And it is difficult to admit that a duly awakened state of feeling, on the subject of eternal salvation, can exist in that man, who has never examined himself, or who is not induced frequently to examine himself, whether he be in the faith.¹ It has been said, and I think truly, that he who never doubted, never believed. There is such a state of mind, as that of "holding the truth in unrighteousness;" and without an inquiry by some scriptural criterion, how is any one to ascertain, whether this be his own state or not? There is a faith spoken of by St. James which avails not to salvation;² and how is the justifying faith of St. Paul to be distinguished from it without a reference to the effects which the latter produces? The safety of the soul is not a point that is to be

¹ 2 Cor. xiii. 5. Psalm cxix. 33.

² Chap. ii. 14. "Can (*this*) faith, ἡ πίστις, save him?" An attention to the use of the definitive article in this discourse of St. James, would remove the apparent discrepancy between him and St. Paul. It is needless to observe that the article, *The, This, That*, refers *definitely* to something before spoken, limiting the sense of the noun to which it is joined. Our translators have, unhappily, in this passage of St. James, left the article unnoticed.

taken for granted ; nor is it always, or perhaps often, at once ascertained. It is usually the result of experience,—the gracious consequence of an operative faith.¹

Let us now approach, with due reverence for Divine inspiration, and a humble desire of scriptural guidance and instruction, the remaining branch of our subject, and consider—

2. ST. PAUL'S DEFINITION OF FAITH IN THE WORDS OF OUR TEXT.

In entering on this part of our subject, it may be necessary to premise, as an apology for the remarks which have already been made, and which may seem to be rendered unnecessary by the Apostle's definition, that though I consider his definition as relating to the justifying faith,

¹ See St. Paul's climax, Rom. v. 1, &c. Believers are "justified through faith," they have, it is their privilege to have, "peace with God,"—they, in fact, have it, and it is their duty to cultivate a knowledge of it ; they have been brought into a state of "Grace," or favour with God,—they "rejoice in hope of His glory ;" they rejoice in the "tribulations," inward or outward, of their present warfare. But mark the process by which these blessings are brought into possession. "Tribulation worketh patience ; and patience experience," or (*δοκιμην*) proof, "and experience hope ; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." And if a "perfect love," (1 John iv. 18.) whatever be the meaning of the word "perfect" in St. John's use of it, be necessary to cast out fear, an imperfect love must admit of fear in proportion to the defects found in that love.

I do not consider him as describing faith in its office of justifying. This is an important distinction. We are not only justified by faith in Christ ; but we live, we walk, we resist temptation, or overcome difficulties, and persevere unto the end, by means of faith. And it will be found that St. Paul is speaking of it in these ulterior effects when he defines its meaning in the words before us ; and therefore, while he states what are its effects in the heart which it influences, he leads us to inquire whether those effects be produced in our own souls.

That the Apostle is not speaking of faith in its office of justifying the ungodly, may be inferred from the state of those to whom he was writing. They were believers in Christ, and were therefore persons already justified. He addresses them as such throughout his Epistle. They were, in common with himself, “ of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”¹ They had given evidence that they were believers by their sufferings for Christ’s sake.² It is further to be remarked that the instances which the Apostle produces from the records of scripture for the encouragement of the believing Hebrews, are instances of believers, who, as such, were already justified ; and must have been so, before they could have performed by faith those acts which the Apostle attributes to their faith. He is not therefore

¹ Heb. x. 39.

² Heb. x. 34.

speaking of faith as the justifying principle ; but of its effects in the justified person : and to these his definition exclusively belongs.

This will appear if we inquire what are the objects of faith as spoken of in our text—not Christ the justifier, the single object of faith in its office of justifying ; but “ things ” which are “ hoped for ” by the justified person,—“ things unseen.”

What then is the import of the word *hope*, when spoken of, as it is here, to denote an act or state of the mind ? With what is hope to be contrasted ? Its converse is not hesitation and doubt, but despair.¹ It does not imply a certainty of attaining its object, but expectation accompanied with desire after it. The Christian’s expectation, indeed, cannot disappoint him, though he often fears that it may ; for “ they that sow in tears shall reap in joy : He that goeth on his way weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”² The spiritual husbandmen’s tears are often occasioned by apprehensions of a failure of his “ hoped for ” crop. Let any one consider the use which he makes of the word *hope* in common parlance, and determine for himself whether it necessarily implies an assurance of obtaining that which is its object.

¹ “ Faith is opposed to infidelity ; hope to despair.”—*Taylor*.

² Psalm cxxvi. 6.

The objects then of a living faith, as the means of supporting its possessor under all trials and of carrying him through all temptations, are things not yet possessed, but “hoped for,”—things of which he can have no cognizance by bodily sense—they are “things unseen.” The knowledge which we have of their existence and nature, and the expectation we form of enjoying them, are the effects of faith in the word of God wherein they are revealed to us. And these hoped-for blessings are represented in the record concerning them as so great and glorious in their character, that, in proportion as they are realized by faith to the mind, and as faith is enabled to grasp its immediate object, the redeeming Saviour, they outweigh both the allurements and sufferings of the present world. Thus the believer is enabled to “reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in him.”¹ These objects of hope are “things that pass man’s understanding”—things suited to meet and exceed the utmost desires of the regenerate heart.

In a foregoing chapter of this Epistle the Apostle speaks of “the assurance of hope”² as the privilege of believers in Christ. But does he speak of it as a necessary result of faith in Christ? On the contrary he supposes the believ-

¹ Romans viii. 18.

² Chapter vi. 11.

ing Hebrews not to have attained it. He exhorts them to cultivate it by “diligence” and alacrity of mind in the work of faith and labour of love. He intimates the necessity of maintaining that diligence to the enjoyment of the blessing “unto the end.” It is not enjoyed by all believers; and in those who do enjoy it, its continuance is suspended on an obediential walk with God, and devotedness of heart to His service. Duty and privilege are inseparably connected in the believer’s experience. But let us advert to the relation which faith bears to hope and its objects. This relation is spoken of in the two members of our text. It is “*the substance* of things hoped for,”—it is “*the evidence* of things not seen.”

“Faith is *the substance* of things hoped for.” In the margin of our Bibles the word is rendered “*the ground or confidence* of things hoped for.” It occurs but five times in the New Testament, and in four of these it denotes the acting of the soul in relation to revealed truth. In the remaining instance it is used in a glorious description of Christ, as God-man. He is the brightness of the glory of God, and the express image of His *person*,¹ rather of His essence or substance, for the relative pronoun *His* rehearses, not the person of the Son, but God who is spoken of at the commencement of the paragraph in the first

¹ Hebrews i. 3.

verse. A similar description of our Lord occurs in the Epistle to the Colossians which ought to be compared with this. There the Apostle speaks of Him as “the image of the invisible God,”¹ where the Godhead or essence is unquestionably intended. When Christ is spoken of as the express image of the essence or substance of Deity, the context indicates an allusion to the common symbol of Deity, the sun. Christ is “the brightness of the Glory, and the express image of His Essence.” Light is the image of the sun—that by which the sun becomes visible to man. It is that without which the orb would be invisible and unknown.

The word *hypostasis* therefore, in all the five places where it is used, means one and the same thing. It denotes that which is the substance, the foundation, of some thing to which it relates. Perhaps the literal rendering would be *underprop*.² The sun is the source of light. The Godhead is the foundation of the atonement and righteousness, and of the whole mediatorial character, of the incarnate Son. Faith in that atonement is the underprop, the support, of the Christian hope, and of the “things hoped for.”

The word then which is rendered substance in our text, is properly so rendered. The “things hoped for,” and which are “unseen,” derive their

¹ Chap. i. 15. So 2 Cor. iv. 4.

² ὑποστασις from υποστημι to set under.

subsistence in the believer's mind from faith in the Divine record. They have no other prop. When, therefore, the Apostle says that faith is "*the substance* of things hoped for," he means that their existence in the mind of man depends on the exercise of faith in Divine Revelation, for the existence of "unseen things," not being cognizable by the organs of bodily sensation, must be dependent on that faith which credits the testimony of that existence, and of all the attributes which belong to them.

This the Apostle further confirms, when he adds, that "faith is the evidence of things not seen." This proposition is explanatory of the former. The existence and excellence of "things hoped for," which consist altogether of "things unseen," must depend on that conviction of the mind which he calls faith, or a belief of the Divine record concerning them. It can have no other foundation: and our hope of possessing the promised benefits arises, exclusively, from the exercise of faith in the word of God, and must wax and wane with that faith. If faith in the word of God be established, the hope of promised blessings will be firm and stable: when that faith vacillates, with respect either to the perfection of the atonement made, or the evidence of a personal interest in it, the Christian's hope will proportionally vacillate with it. Faith stands connected with the atonement, and

the promises which are appended to it: hope regards the promised blessings, as future, unseen, and most desirable. Faith is therefore the parent of hope; and the latter must depend for its existence and stability on the existence and stability of the former.

I have entered into this discussion for the purpose of coming to an inquiry in what way the words of our text can be construed as giving any sanction to that which I must consider to be an unfounded notion, that assurance is of the essence of faith,—a notion which I consider as contrary to scripture, to reason, and to the experience of the children of God. It is, I conceive, a notion full of danger, both to the church and to the world—to the humble disciple and to the presumptuous professor. If no other evidence than this definition of the Apostle can be produced, the opinion must be classed among the vagaries of the ever restless mind of man.

The essence of faith, as I understand it, is submission to the righteousness of God. The want of this was the damning sin of the Jews, deplored by our Apostle.¹ Faith is self-despair, accompanied with a willingness to be saved in the way of God's appointment.² It is the act

¹ Rom. x. 3.

² To call on, or invoke the name of the Lord Jesus, is, in effect, that faith to which salvation is promised. Rom. xii. 13.

of a condemned criminal, bowing to the equity of the sentence passed on him, and committing himself to the compassion of his sovereign, in whose hands are placed the issues of life and death. He may be able to appropriate, with a greater or less degree of personal satisfaction, the description of character to which the offer of pardon is made; but he is ready to receive that pardon unconditionally. Let him but be assured that he may take advantage of the offer, and he is satisfied. He makes no terms—he sees clearly the suitableness of the proposal made to his state and condition. He is convinced he must be saved as a sinner by an act of grace. He admits fully the sufficiency of the atonement made by the blood of the incarnate God. He has no doubt about the merit of His obedience to the Divine law. But he questions the sincerity of his own faith—his own submission to the righteousness of God. He is not an infidel; for he loves the truth as it is in Jesus, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He is not a heretic; for he cordially embraces all the doctrines of the Gospel. He is not a mere formalist; for he feels a deep personal interest in the revelation of a Saviour. He is not a self-justiciary; for he renounces unfeignedly all personal righteousness. Is this man to be numbered among those who believe not, and shall be damned?

Oh, let not humble believers be unnecessarily

distressed. “ They find not the sugared joy and delight which indeed doth accompany faith, but so as a separable accident, as a thing that may be removed from it ; yea, there is a cause why it should be removed. The light would never be so acceptable, were it not for that usual intercourse of darkness. Too much honey doth turn to gall ; and too much joy, even spiritual, would make us wantons. Happier a great deal is that man’s case, whose soul by inward desolation is humbled, than he whose heart is through abundance of spiritual delight lifted up and exalted above measure. Better is it sometimes to go down into the pit with him who, beholding darkness, and bewailing the loss of inward joy and consolation, crieth from the bottom of the lowest hell, “ My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me ? ” than continually to walk arm in arm with angels, to sit as it were in Abraham’s bosom, and to have no thought, no cogitation, but “ I thank my God, it is not with me as it is with other men.” No, God will have them that shall walk in light, to feel now and then what it is to sit in the shadow of death.” ¹

Let the ministers of God’s word deal with the feeble minded as their Lord dealt with His disciple Thomas. Let them not condemn the self-

¹ *Hooker’s Sermon on the certainty and perpetuity of faith in the elect.*

despairing doubter as an infidel ; but let them encourage the humble penitent to approach his Saviour, and, as it were, to put the hand of faith into the prints of the nails, and the scar of the spear. Let the bruised reed be supported, and the smoking wick be quickened. Let the trembling sinner be exhorted and encouraged to wait for the salvation of the Lord ; for “ blessed are all they who WAIT for Him.”¹

But I again adopt the words of the judicious author whom I have before quoted : “ To our own safety, our own sedulity is required. And then blessed for ever and ever be that mother’s child, whose faith hath made him the child of God. The earth may shake, the pillars of the world may tremble under us ; the countenance of the heaven may be appalled, the sun may lose his light, the moon her beauty, the stars their glory ; but concerning the man that trusted in God, if the fire have proclaimed itself unable as much as to singe a hair of his head ; if lions, beasts ravenous by nature, and keen with hunger, being set to devour, have as it were religiously adored the very flesh of the faithful man ; what is there in the world that shall change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter his affection towards God, or the affection of God to him ? If I be of God, who shall make a separation between me

¹ Isaiah xxx. 18. See also chap. xlix. 23.

and my God ? “ Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ? No, I am persuaded that neither tribulation, nor anguish, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword, nor life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall ” ever prevail so far over me. “ I know in whom I have believed ; ” I am not ignorant whose precious blood hath been shed for me ; I have a Shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power ; unto Him I commit myself ; His own finger hath engraven this sentence on the tables of my heart ; “ Satan hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have prayed that thy faith fail not.” Therefore the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep as a jewel unto the end ; and by labour, through the gracious mediation of His prayer, I shall keep it.

APPENDIX.

SINCE the foregoing discourse was written, the author has met with the *Tactica Sacra* of Dr. John Arrowsmith, who was Professor of Theology, and afterwards Head of Trinity College, Cambridge. From this treatise, which is a dissertation on Eph. vi. 10, &c. the author has translated and subjoins an extract on the subject to which his discourse chiefly relates. He is not apprised that the *Tactica Sacra* has ever appeared in an English dress, and believes that copies of the original Latin are become rather scarce.

The extracts here produced are taken from chapters vii. and ix, the former of which treats of “the shield of faith,” and the latter of “the helmet of salvation.”

The world is engaged in the mimicry of the stage; the church in a serious warfare. The standard of the

cross is erected ; Christians are summoned to arms by the Prince of Peace himself ; and they will not obtain their discharge, till they have exchanged life for death. The holy Apostle, with a reference to this view of their character, at once exhorts and arms his Ephesian recruits, exhibiting to them “ the whole armour of God ;” and among other parts of that armour, “ The shield of faith,” which he recommends to their use above all the rest,—“ Above all, taking the shield of faith.”

By “ faith ” in this place we understand not *the faith which is believed* ; for this I apprehend belongs to “ the sword of the Spirit,” spoken of in the next verse : but *the faith which believes*. This is usually considered among our Theologians as being threefold. —Faith with respect to *principles*, or *dogmatic faith* ; comprising a knowledge of the chief doctrines of Christianity and assent to them. Such a faith John ascribes to many of the Jewish rulers, who, although they had not courage to confess Christ on account of the Pharisees, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, yet are said to have believed in Him.—*The faith of miracles*, concerning which Paul speaks, 1 Cor. xiii. 2. “ If I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing : ” where, by “ all faith ” he cannot be understood to mean faith of every kind (because there is one kind which is never separate from charity ;) but one kind of faith in its highest degree, namely, that which relates to miracles of the first class, of which he specifies the removal of mountains.—Lastly, that *faith which is saving*, of which Paul speaks Eph. ii. 8, “ By grace are ye saved through faith,” and Peter

1 Epist. i. 9. "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." In the passage of the Epistle to the Ephesians, of which we are treating, the Apostle speaks not of the *faith of principles*; for this has no power to quench the darts of the devil, but is itself frequently quenched by them, as in the temporary hearers spoken of in the Saviour's parable of the sower: nor to the *faith of miracles*; which, being enjoyed in common by the elect and reprobate, ought not to be taken up by us, nor sought for, in preference to all other things: but to that which is *saving* and peculiar to the elect, which, although a single and separate species, yet admits of two gradations, *recumbence* and *assurance*. This ancient distinction (between the three species of faith) which some innovators in the present day labour to antiquate, we shall proceed to justify.

That this distinction was known of old, and by no means disallowed, appears by the following express words of Chrysostom—"By this faith I do not mean the faith of miracles, but that of principles." But that more light, and perhaps higher authority, may be obtained, I will request the reader's attention to the three arguments which follow.

1. The faith of principles, or a dogmatic faith, belongs to all regenerate persons, but is not confined to them; since in the new creation, as in the first, God says "Let there be light," and calls all his children "children of light." Yet this is possessed by other men;—and why should I say *men*? By devils also an historical faith is possessed; for they believe and tremble."

2. The faith of miracles belongs neither to the

regenerate universally, nor to them exclusively. It does not belong to them universally ; for John the Baptist, as we learn from John the Evangelist (ch. x. 41.) wrought no miracle : nor to them exclusively ; for some will boast of miraculous works, who will nevertheless hear the sentence, “ I never knew you.” Matt. vii. 23.

3. The third species of faith has two gradations, and is to be thus stated. A saving faith (which some call a justifying faith, and others the faith of the elect) belongs in its character of *recumbence* to all regenerate persons, is confined to them, and is always in existence, that is, it exists in every state after a reception of the grace of Christ. In its character of *assurance*, it, perhaps, also belongs to all regenerate persons, and is confined to them, but is not always in existence. In confirmation of the first of these points, those passages of scripture in which Christians are said to live by faith, and which identify the “ new creature ” with “ faith working by love,” may be adduced, as is evident in the Epistle to the Galatians, if we compare chap. v. 6. with chap. vi. 15. With respect to the latter point, though I do not positively deny the faith of assurance to all regenerate persons, (supposing them to be of adult age) and that during their pilgrimage on earth, to be enjoyed in its proper season, at an earlier or later period ; and although I can have no hesitation in saying that it belongs exclusively to the regenerate ; (for however the unregenerate may boast, and sleep securely, their security differs from the assurance of faith as hell from heaven) yet I confidently assert that it is not always in existence.

Indeed, there are two states of the man who is engrafted into Christ, in one of which this assurance is never found, and rarely in the other. The former is the state of desertion, which is diametrically opposed to assurance. For if God have withdrawn a consciousness of His favour, how can there be a certainty concerning it? If a man be assured of it, how can he be in a state of desertion? Truly if faith, as justifying, be a certain persuasion of the favour of God towards ourselves, it follows that the man who, after being converted, has been left of God for however short a time, has fallen from his justifying faith, at least for that time; a conclusion at which Tompson the Diatribist, and those who with him defend the defectibility of grace, would rejoice to prove. The latter is the state of spiritual infancy. For, as long as Christians are under age, their heavenly Father does not usually indulge them with so large a treasure of joy; but (to use the language of St. Paul) brings them by degrees “into all the riches of assurance.” Coloss. ii. 2. Those who have not yet been brought under the discipline of the school of Christ, are rarely made partakers of those blessings which are bestowed on pupils of the upper class. God forbid that we should limit the Holy One of Israel: it may be, and sometimes is the case, that certainty is engendered even at the commencement of the new life, as well that which is intuitive as that which is inferential. But generally there is the same distinction between recumbence and assurance, as there is between reason and erudition. Reason is the foundation of erudition, of which therefore brute animals are incapable; in like manner the faith of recumbence is the foundation

of the faith of assurance, to which therefore they must be utter strangers who, through want of faith, do not depend on Christ, but on themselves and some qualities of their own. Erudition graces reason as it is exercised, and so to speak, elevated by study: so assurance crowns the recumbence of faith, when strengthened by frequent exercise. Erudition may be lost by neglect or by disease, while reason nevertheless remains. So may the certainty of hope be also, while the faith of recumbence continues. Lastly, as every man is possessed of reason, but not of erudition; so all true believers are incumbent on Christ, though all are not assured of their interest in him.

Notwithstanding this I acknowledge, for the thing is too plain to be denied, that the doctrine held by some of the first Reformers, and by some other valuable persons in the church of God, differed a little from these views of the subject; since in their definitions of faith they were accustomed to speak of a firm persuasion and assurance. As for instance, *Luther*, on the 48th chapter of *Genesis*, expresses himself thus: "An historical faith neither rests on the word, nor gives credit to it; but it says, 'I hear that Christ suffered and died.' But a true faith, on the other hand, thinks thus; 'I believe that Christ suffered and died for me; of this I entertain no doubt, and by this faith I acquiesce and trust in that word against death and sin.'" Let *Calvin* follow *Luther*: (*Institut. Lib. 3. 2. § 7.* "We shall give a true definition of faith if we say that it is a firm and certain knowledge of Divine goodwill towards us, which, being built by the Holy Spirit on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our

minds, and sealed on our hearts.” Others have followed these first heroes of the Reformation. *Beza* says, “We call faith a kind of assured knowledge, which the Holy Spirit, by His sole grace and goodness, engraves more and more on the hearts of the elect, by which knowledge every one of them, being assured in his own heart of his own election, applies to himself the promise of salvation in Christ Jesus.” *Jerom Zanchius* speaks in a similar manner: “Faith is nothing else than a sure persuasion, derived from the word of God, that we are gratuitously elected in Christ, saved through Christ, and to be glorified with the church of Christ.” Lastly, *Perkins*: “True faith is an infallible and particular certification concerning the remission of sins and eternal life.”¹

There is no need, I conceive, of producing further testimony, since it is evident that this opinion was so received that to differ from it was to be suspected of heterodoxy; and therefore our forefathers rarely dared to commit to writing a contrary opinion without some prefatory remarks. As witnesses of this I produce our own *John Fox*, and *Robert Baronius* of Scotland. The former in his book concerning Christ as the gratuitous author of justification, speaks as follows: “If I may be permitted freely to give my opinion as a member of a free church, my reason leads me to con-

¹ Other quotations from the writings of the same Reformers may be produced in abundance, which admit of doubts as not being inconsistent with the exercise of a genuine and saving faith in Christ. See, for instance, *Luther* on the Galatians, ch. iv. 6. Fol. 189. *Calvin*, in Ps. li. 11. and lxxvii. 10. Inst. Lib. iii. cap. 11. *Translator's Note*.

sider this confidence in mercy, this certainty of the promised salvation, as being most closely connected with faith, and as being that which every one ought, of necessity, to apply to himself; but then, at the time when it is most fully applied, it is not that which, of itself, properly and absolutely relieves us from sin, and justifies us before God; but there is something else proposed in the gospel, which must, in some way or other, have precedence of this certitude in the natural order of things, and which is the instrument of our justification in the sight of God. For faith in the person of the Son, which in the first place reconciles us to God, necessarily takes precedence; then a confidence of assured mercy follows this faith," &c.

The latter, in his "Philosophy the handmaid of Theology," after showing that the act of faith which precedes justification as its instrumental cause, differs from the fiducial act whereby we are persuaded that we have obtained remission of sins, which in the same treatise he states to be posterior to the act which justifies; concludes thus: (Exercit 3. Art. 10.) "I embraced this opinion when I first began to study Theology; but I suspected it on account of its novelty, and therefore condemned it to perpetual obscurity. But having read this year the very learned animadversions and corrections of *David Pareus*, on the fourth volume of *Bellarmino*, I find it so plainly stated by him, that, relying on the testimony of so great a man, and protected by it, I shrink not from giving publicity to it."

With respect to the opinion now held among English Divines, whether preachers or authors, I choose rather to propound it in the words of the celebrated

Davenant than in my own. “The word trust,” he says, “designates two things; the act of relying on Jesus Christ, and of adhering to Him, whereby, as with both arms, we embrace Christ, and by that act endeavour to obtain from God the Father, pardon, grace, and glory: and we consider this as the act to which justification is annexed, that is, absolution from sin, and acceptance into the grace and favour of God; whether the sinner in that first moment be assured of forgiveness actually obtained, or not. Trust also sometimes denotes the consequent effect of justifying faith, viz. a full persuasion, and, as it were, a vivid sense of pardon vouchsafed, and of Divine favour obtained. We grant that this trust is not the faith which justifies, but its offspring, which the justified soul usually obtains with difficulty, after many exercises of faith and holiness.”

Far be it, however, from us to censure those truly learned and most pious persons, whom we have already praised, because they differ from us a little in opinion on this subject. The orthodox ought rather to show their respect for them by making a handsome apology in their behalf, which I institute as follows. Since there are two principal acts of saving faith, viz. *reliance* and *assurance*, some of the reformed doctors, being less anxious than perhaps was meet about the former of these acts, dwelt almost exclusively on the second in their definitions of faith, which they seem to have done, in order that they might lead their readers and hearers not to rest satisfied with a lower grade, but to climb to the very summit of the great blessing of faith. And to this, if I mistake not, they were induced, partly from too great ardour of mind in op-

posing the errors of the Papists, who strove to obtrude on the churches I know not what general assent instead of a sound faith ; partly, from too close an attention to their own experience. For as “ the joy of the Lord is the strength of His people ” (as Nehemiah of old observed to the Israelites, who were fainting under calamity) it is highly probable that God, the Best and the Greatest of Beings, vouchsafed a peculiar degree of assurance to those heroes, whose instrumentality He condescended to employ in the purification of His church, when He called them to undertake so important a province of duty, and such exhausting labours. Hence arose the descriptions which they have propounded, not of that “ little faith,” (of which they have elsewhere spoken), but of a full assurance. Those who understand otherwise, put a wrong construction on that which is in itself truly stated, observes *Amecius*, in his *Antisynodals*. I add, moreover, that there is a double justification, one in *the court of heaven*,—the other in *the court of conscience*. That faith which is the instrument of the former, we most justly state to be recumbence or reliance : but those persons, whose cause we are now pleading, while they regarded chiefly the latter, (viz. that justification which relates to the court of conscience) rightly stated the instrument of enjoying it to be the assurance of faith.

While we are on this subject it will not be irrelevant briefly to show what instruments the Lord used in extorting the truth even from those who were reluctant to allow it. Lest the error should be perpetuated, yea, lest it should injure the souls of pious persons, who are truly partakers of faith, but destitute

of this kind of certainty; our most merciful Father hastened to bring back his church into the right way, and that, principally, by furnishing the enemies of the truth with weapons, of which the orthodox found it impossible to disarm them, till they were obliged to acknowledge the truth that assurance of grace is not of the essence of a justifying faith. Two examples of their reasoning may be produced, the one *Armenian*, the other that of *Bellarmino*. Let us begin with *Bellarmino*, who, in a tone of triumph rather than of argumentation, vaunts thus to his readers: "The sectarists of our time teach that every man is justified only by a special faith, by which every one believes for a certainty that he, for Christ's sake, is just in the sight of God. This may be compared with any paradox you please; for it is not only above and beside, but plainly contrary to all reason. For I inquire, when I begin to believe that I am justified, am I so or am I not? If I am then justified, I am therefore justified by that faith which is posterior to my justification: if I am not then justified, that faith is false; and therefore it is not a Divine or justifying faith, unless we can assert that men are justified by a lie." Thus *Bellarmino* argues. Let those who maintain the opinion which we are modestly opposing, see how they can escape the one or the other horn of this dilemma. We have nothing to fear from it, who maintain that the formal act of a justifying faith is not a certainty of forgiveness obtained, but a recumbence, or an act of trust by which we depend on Christ, or recline on the mercy of God through Him; which in the nature of things, precedes that act by which we believe that our sins are forgiven.

The *Arminians* argue thus in favour of their general redemption:—"That which all and every one are bound to believe, is unquestionably true. All and every one are bound to believe that Christ died for them. This therefore is most true. They labour to prove the minor proposition by this, that faith in Christ, by the confession itself of the Contra-remonstrants, is a certain persuasion and assurance with which a man embraces the Saviour with this trust, that He was crucified and died not only for the sins of others, but for His own sins." This is the very handle of that weapon which the Remonstrants use in their synodal writings. The reply made by our writers varies; but (I would say it without any reflection on others) none of them by any means satisfactorily meet the argument, except those who separate the certainty of special grace from the essential character of a justifying faith, considered as justifying. But their answer is easy, partly by distinguishing the act of believing in Christ, which precedes justification, and is a simple reliance on His person as qualified in all respects to discharge that most grand office of Mediator, which has been devolved on Him; from the act of believing that Christ died for them, which (if rightly performed) amounts to assurance, and can have no existence but in a person already justified. The answer partly consists in maintaining that the former act is required of all men, at least of all who are within the bounds of the church; while the latter is required of those only, who, through grace, have been enabled to exercise faith in its former act."

The author, in the sequel of this chapter, pro-

ceeds to expound and confirm the thesis, that the person of Christ, as the Mediator, is the proper and formal object of justifying faith. *Circumferentia fidei est verbum Dei ; centrum fidei Verbum Deus* : “The circumference of faith is the word of God ; the centre of faith is God the Word.”

Again, in the 9th chapter, the subject of which is the Christian Helmet, or “the assurance of hope,” the author writes as follows:—

But the nature and character of this assurance (of hope) will appear much more clearly, if, premising some distinctions, we unravel the three following points. There is a threefold assurance spoken of in the writings of St. Paul ; one of *knowledge*, Coloss. ii. “the full assurance of understanding ;” another of *faith*, Heb. x. “the full assurance of faith ;” the third of *hope*, Heb. vi. “the full assurance of hope.” The character of each of these will immediately appear, if a practical syllogism be formed after this manner. Whosoever is adopted as a son of God, he is beyond all doubt a future heir of heavenly glory : I, by the grace of God, am adopted as His son ; therefore I also am an heir of heavenly glory. The Christian who is in an adult state of grace, apprehends at once the proposition of this syllogism by *the assurance of knowledge*, as a truth of the Gospel to which he yields the fullest and firmest assent : the assumption he apprehends by *the assurance of faith*, relying on the testimony which the Spirit of adoption bears to our spirit. Lastly, he embraces the conclusion arising out of these premises by *the assurance of hope*, as the Apostle has taught us, Rom. v. 2. “By

faith we have access into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Hence it appears that although the assurance of faith may be distinguished from the assurance of hope, it cannot be separated from it. The same Hebrew word *בטח* is sometimes rendered to believe, and sometimes to hope. And the Apostle requires a degree of hope commensurate with the degree of faith when he says, Rom. xv. 13; “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

Each of these is, however, twofold; it is either *intuitive*, which, arising from the immediate testimony of the Holy Spirit, places salvation fully in our view, and contains in itself, as it were, the first fruits of the beatific vision; or it is *inferential*, which is derived from the perception and spiritual experience of holy habits, which are communicated to us by the grace of God; and of works, concerning which our consciences testify within us, that they are done according to the will of God, or, as our Lord expresses it in the Gospel of St. John, “wrought in God.”

These things being premised, we proceed to inquire whether that of which we are treating, viz. assurance, be in the present state *absolutely* a *full* assurance, excluding all doubt. I answer in the negative. For there remains in our hearts, notwithstanding the grace of sanctification, and the most abundant sealing of the Spirit Himself, the fuel of sin in the remains of concupiscence, which becomes the fountain and source of renewed doubts. It may, however, be said to be, *relatively*, a full assurance, because *intuitive* assurance, while it continues, although it does not eradicate the

seminal principle, yet it removes for the most part the consciousness of doubting, according to Chrysostom, who says, ‘When the Spirit bears witness, what doubt can remain.’ *Inferential* assurance, although it takes away neither the seminal principle nor the consciousness of doubting, yet it surmounts all hesitation, and prevents its becoming fatal: and therefore, though it may, perhaps, fail in the moment of conflict, yet its issue is victory in the spiritual warfare.

Great light will, I think be shed on our subject, by instituting a parallelism between assurance and doubt on the one hand, and holiness and sin on the other. Where sin reigns, as it does in all unregenerate persons, there may be hypocrisy, and a counterfeited piety; but not one particle of true holiness. So where doubt reigns, as it does amidst the boastings of hope uttered by a profligate, it may be that some vain confidence, or presumption, may arise in lucid intervals; but no assurance properly so called. In the hearts of the regenerate themselves, sin dwells together with holiness, but in a weakened degree, and arising from opposite sources, namely, the spirit and the flesh; in like manner also, doubt is co-existent with assurance, which, as *Isidore* defines it, is an ordinary fear, with respect to one side of the point at issue, or an admission of the other side mixed with great apprehension of being deceived, and a want of decision with respect to both. Nevertheless, holiness is said to be *relatively* perfect, even in our pilgrimage state, according to Rom. xv. 14, “I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness;” because sanctification excludes the dominion of sin: why may not certitude in like manner be called πληροφορία, a word

which signifies fulness, because, at some time or other, through the conduct of the Spirit, under whose banner it carries on its warfare, it puts to flight the closely compacted hosts of doubts which now distract the soul.

A second question arises, whether assurance be uninterrupted? I answer by making a distinction. It is so with respect to its foundation; for the Apostle testifies that “whosoever believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself.” But it is not so as to its exercise; for the Spirit who bloweth where and when He will, does not always actually testify to our spirit, that we are the sons of God; but He sometimes withdraws Himself. Hence those frequent aspirations of Bernard, “O hour of infrequent recurrence, of short continuance: oh, that it had been continued!” But the grace which is inherent in us is often so faint, that we can scarcely elicit from it any comfortable certainty. If any one inquire the reason of that cloudiness which sometimes darkens inferential assurance, even in the consciences of persons who usually walk in the light of God’s countenance; I hardly think it necessary to adduce any other reason, than that it is inferential. Since, as logicians tell us, we more strongly assent to those things which are apprehended as principles, than to those which are apprehended as inferences; and the conclusion always follows the weaker part of the syllogism. Now then, as this assurance results from this kind of reasoning, every true believer will be a partaker of eternal life: I am a true believer; therefore I shall be a partaker of eternal life: the mind much more strongly embraces the major proposition, as a principle clearly revealed in the scriptures, than it does the minor, which is inferred from experience,

which is sometimes more and sometimes less lively, according to the clearness or obscurity of our views, respecting the reality of our own faith. Hence it is easy to determine that the weaker part of the syllogism is the proposition which is assumed ; and, therefore, that the conclusion which necessarily follows it, is sometimes so faintly apprehended, that it contains little of assurance, whenever the fruits of faith are scarcely or unsatisfactorily apparent."

THE END.

SEELEYS, THAMES DITTON, SURREY.



[illegible]

PRINTED IN U.S.A

BS1450.51 .B58
Lectures on the fifty-first Psalm

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00051 6809

